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Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #4 04/01

Next Generation Magazine

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XBOX

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Malice
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New Legends

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Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #4

→NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

THE XBOX GAMES ARRIVE

We pull the curtain up to reveal five of the system's first games

■ An Interview With Oddworld's Lorne Lanning

■ Game Boy Advance

■ Sega's New Plan

■ Indrema

■ Xbox X-philes

NextGen

■ EDITORIAL

Manifest Destiny

For those unfamiliar with the term "manifest destiny," it is used to describe a future event that is accepted as inevitable. The stories in this issue are in many ways tied together by that concept. Take Sega, for example. Many would argue that Sega's failure with 32X, Sega CD, and Saturn sealed the fate of Dreamcast before it even launched. Considering the company history and the strength of its competition, Sega faced an industry that simply couldn't commit itself wholeheartedly to Dreamcast. Despite a Herculean effort that resulted in some incredible first-party games, Sega has given up hardware for good. What's next for Sonic and friends? See page 6.

Microsoft's entrance into the console business certainly didn't help Sega either. Any industry insider will tell you Microsoft is really shaking up the market. Is the software giant with a tyrannical reputation screwing up the world of games? No way. The company has been proactively forging win-win partnerships with developers, publishers, and retailers. The plan is to see that Xbox isn't profitable just for Microsoft, but for everyone involved. That plan starts with a smart technology approach and a strong support staff that has enabled developers to get next-generation games up and running in record times — and we've got a stunning, 24-page look at the proof. The first Xbox games are actually running on Xbox hardware, beginning on page 38.

But there's another, smaller player out there with some radical notions about what a console can be if it doesn't play by the same rules as the big boys. Is the time right for an independent, underground, art-house game machine? The Indrema team told us so during our world-exclusive first look at their console on page 62.

— Tom Russo

■ Star Wars Starfighter

■ Warhammer Online

■ Wild Riders

■ Bridge Commander

■ Onimusha

▶ Finals
Played, tested, reviewed

▶ Ending
All things have their end

THREE HEROES
ONE ENEMY
ALL ACTION

Inspired by LucasArts' rich *Star Wars* flight-game legacy, *Star Wars Starfighter* combines intense air and space combat in a fast-paced action-adventure. Live the lives of three fighter pilots in a series of harrowing missions to save the galaxy from the evil Trade Federation. Pilot extraordinary 3D vehicles—including the Naboo N-1 plus a variety of never-before-seen craft—through stunningly real worlds in 14-plus air and space missions.

STAR WARS
STARFIGHTER
PlayStation.2
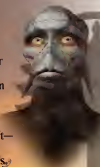
Sega pulls plug on Dreamcast

Virtua Fighter 4 and others coming to PS2; Dreamcast now $99

➡ What can 85 billion yen buy! Not a place alongside Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft at the hardware table — but perhaps a graceful exit from the hardware business. Sega will stop production of Dreamcast consoles on March 31, and the company announced it will develop and publish games for PlayStation 2, Game Boy Advance, Palm handhelds, and potentially Xbox. Before departing the console manufacturing business, Sega President Isao Okawa gave 85 billion yen (about $735 million) to the

company as a means to offset four consecutive years of losses, including an expected $503.8 million this year.

What would've saved Sega as a console company? "More consumers buying our product," answers Sega Vice President of Marketing and Corporate Communications Charles Bellfield. "If we had achieved the sell-through we initially stated, things would be different. Sega did a good job in attracting a core audience, but we failed to bridge the gap between this group and the

mainstream consumer."

The writing had been on the wall for months before the official announcement on Jan. 30. Although Sega continued to provide critically acclaimed games such as NFL2K1 and Shenmue, it couldn't escape the looming shadows of PS2, Xbox, and GameCube. No matter what the company tried — offering rebates, dropping its price, and offering online console gaming — it couldn't establish a sufficient installed base to stay alive. Sega reports that 18 million units were sold in the first six months after

launch, but only 135 million Dreamcasts were sold in the nine months that followed.

While publisher support and sales figures declined, the key reasons for the timing of Sega's announcement were to give the company enough time to establish itself before the next holiday buying frenzy and to make sure all losses were limited to the past fiscal year. Moving forward, Sega begins its journey as a third-party publisher with a clean financial slate.

The announcement was a depressing milestone for the 3 million consumers who believed in the company enough to buy a Sega console after the Saturn fiasco, but PlayStation 2 owners found joy in the new development. Sega President

> **"Sega did a good job in attracting a core audience, but we failed to bridge the gap between this group and the mainstream consumer."** — Charles Bellfield, VP of corp. comms., Sega

Namir Kern

10 | 55 |

■ Infogrames is still delivering Dreamcast games as promised, such as the recently released *Unreal Tournament* (top/bottom left) and the upcoming *Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare* (below)

5 | 10 |

■ Although there's no slot to play currently owned Dreamcast discs, the Pace set-top box will be able to download games off the Internet

Peter Moore confirmed Virtua Fighter 4, Space Channel 5, Sakura Wars, and two Let's Make a Sports Team games this year for PS2. Moore also noted that Sonic the Hedgehog Advance, Chu-Chu Rocket, and Puyo Puyo are in development for Game Boy Advance.

Few game publishers seemed surprised by the move, and many had planned accordingly. "It's something we

anticipated, and we didn't have plans to develop exclusive titles for the system," says Infogrames CCO Yves Legris. "On the other hand, we're not abandoning [Dreamcast gamers]. We still have games coming out for Dreamcast owners, which will be an attractive buy at a lower price point." Such a price point is forthcoming, with most new game prices dropping from $49 to $39, according to Sega's Belfield.

And you can expect more such silver lining in the coming months, says John Woodson, president of Babbage's Internet division. "We expect to see quite a few re-releases of Dreamcast games between $10 and $20," predicts Woodson. "There's still a market out there for Dreamcast products, and because game discs and their jewel cases cost only pennies to make, third-party publishers can re-release games and recoup costs." Few would argue that Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 or Ultimate Fighting Championship for $20 would be a great deal, especially if you only shelled out $99 for a system. But while gamers can still buy Dreamcast games at Babbage's mall stores, don't be surprised to find an increasing

number of PS2, Xbox, and GameCube products stealing in-store real estate previously allotted to Dreamcast. Babbage's plans to phase its Dreamcast inventory to its Funcoland and GameStop outlets that deal primarily in used and discontinued games.

One company with a lot to lose by Sega's new business strategy is EA, which is currently the largest third-party game publisher. Whether EA admits it or not, Sega is the one company with the potential to knock EA off its lofty perch. "Let's get it on!" postured EA VP of Corporate Communications Jeff Brown when contacted about his new publishing rival. "EA Sports has been getting lonely, and competition from Sega is firing up everyone in our studios. Sega games look great on their own platform, but they've never had to compete with a top-rate studio."

Waving goodbye to its hardware business, Sega seeks to maximize its Dreamcast R&D investments by licensing its

technology to other hardware manufacturers. Pace Micro Technology is the first announced licensee of this chipset, which will be incorporated into its line of set-top boxes. The Pace, slated for release in mid-2002, will offer digital-video recording (DVR) with the ability to download and play Sega Dreamcast

games. But exactly what kind of audience Dreamcast will have in a year and a half is unknown.

While the restructuring of Sega's business strategy has already begun, the restructuring of the Sega workforce is just

■ One of Sega's first PS2 games will be Virtua Fighter 4

News Bytes

➤ **News Bytes' whole world has turned topsy-turvy** — Sega developing for PS2, Naughty Dog getting acquired by "The Man" (guess it knows not to bite the hand that feeds it? Hah heh), Sid Meier canceling games — it's flat-out crazy

Maybe the craziest thing is how companies like Sega are behind the bizarrely pipsqueaking comments EA President John Riccitiello made about Sega's prospects as a software publisher "It's not quite as

though this is GM saying we'll move BMWs, but it's the same kind of proposition. They may look like BMWs, but I doubt if they'll drive like BMWs" Excuse us for not following the analogy but if first parties are car companies, what does that make third parties? Car dealers? Parts suppliers? Anyway, John, Sega's software was never the problem, but maybe if you talk fast enough, investors won't notice.

Speaking of Sega, well it's the lead news story, so we won't. We won't even mention the wake-like atmosphere that prevailed at the

recent Pace demo among the Sega-exclusive press corps, or the several "Goodbye Dreamcast" dinners we've been invited to.

While we're on the subject of not talking about Sega, we also won't talk about the plainly bizarre decision by Acclaim to publish Zombie Revenge, possibly the most mediocre game for Dreamcast. Of course, that pile 4 squarely ahead on most of the current PS2 software, but pointing that out would probably just be mean, so we won't do that, either

OK, OK, back to Sony. So the

company has downgraded its estimates of PS2 sales to 9 million from 10 million, still citing "component shortages." Maybe the component in Japan is consumers — the country will now only be getting enough PS2s to equal 3 million in sales by the end of March, not 4 million as previously planned. Of course, most of those 3 million are already sold, and there's no shortage of PlayStation 2s languishing on store shelves in old Nihon.

Weak demand for PS2 may be a bad omen for publishers like Eidos, Midway, and 3DO, which are blaming their gloomy financial pictures

on the shortage of PS2s. About that if the shortage ended and consumers didn't ante up? Probably doesn't bear thinking about.

Unless you're Nintendo, which is looking less and less likely to ship GameCube in 2001. Our readers of heavy times already know that but what you don't know is that Nintendo's big boss man, Hiroshi Yamauchi, recently decreed that while "Square can say whatever it wants," there would be no license forthcoming from Nintendo for Square to publish on any Nintendo platforms. Ouch

■ Good news for gamers: the Madden (left) and NFL2K (right) series should push each other toward breakthrough gameplay

beginning. Sega no longer needs a large sales team pushing hardware into the retail channel, and the company may use its "rebirth" as an opportunity for a company-wide shakedown. On the other hand, expect Sega to aggressively recruit for its software-related departments to fuel the company's new endeavors.

In closing this chapter of Sega's history, one significant question remains: Did Dreamcast fail because Sega botched its online console gaming strategy, or is there simply a general disinterest in online play? Infogrames, for one, has faith that console gamers will go online — with the right system. "Console game players are ready to go online, but it's dependent on the sort of the pipeline, and right now it's too small," explains Legris. "At the moment, there's not a broadband console out there, so it's not yet viable. The market won't change overnight; it'll be a step-by-step evolution, and the first step will be the broadband modem and hard drive for PS2. Sega was right in going online but was just too early"

— Kevin Toyama

GameCube Watch

04/01

The heart of Nintendo's next console continues to beat behind the scenes

▶ Well, here we are just a few short months of the Electronics Entertainment Expo kick-off in Los Angeles, and there's still no news from Nintendo about its GameCube console. The company's typically "hush hush" stance, however, hasn't stopped a number of third-party contributors from announcing their support of the system, including the likes of Electronic Arts. Nor has it stopped us from uncovering a few new details about second-party software in development. Unfortunately though, the lack of any major GameCube revelations from the Big 'N' has almost worked to wrongly convince the industry as a whole that the console won't launch in 2001, as planned.

Don't Delay!

"The GameCube isn't coming out until 2002," says the misinformed clerk at a local electronics retailer confidently to his customers. "But you can reserve an Xbox now if you'd like." It's a scenario all too common, it seems, and all started with an unfounded rumor. But don't believe it. Nintendo will ship GameCube stateside this October, as originally announced. How can we be so confident, especially given the firm's rather dodgy past where release dates are concerned? Simple. According to NOA

sources, a marketing budget has internally been approved to launch the system this October, and we've been able to confirm through second-party ties that several projects are slewed for release at the same time. The teams involved have allegedly been working overtime in order to meet the holiday deadline and appease Nintendo. Moreover, the hardware has long been finished, with development kits distributed and third parties working on projects — some of which, and Electronic Arts again comes to mind, can make October too.

SSX vs. 1080

Speaking of Electronic Arts, **Next Gen** has learned that the company has at least five projects in the works for Nintendo GameCube. SSX: Special Edition, an enhanced version of the PS2 snowboarder; FIFA 2001, an update to the PS2 soccer game of the same name;

NFL Madden 200X (code-named because the year isn't clear yet) based on the version delivered for Sony's console; a 3D James Bond FPS rumored to be underway by Eurocom, which made The World is Not Enough for N64; and, of course, Harry Potter — based on the hugely popular children's movies. Like it or not, EA may have some competition on the slopes as second-party Left Field Productions, the maker of Excitebike 64, is allegedly in the works with a snowboarding game of its own. According to sources, the game is an update to the classic 1080 Snowboarding for Nintendo 64, which was created by Nintendo's own Entertainment, Analysis and Development (a.k.a. Miyamoto's groups). Left Field is also underway with a sequel to NBA Courtside for GameCube, and we expect great things from this up-and-coming developer.

A Major Launch

Though **Next Gen** was unable to confirm which titles EAD will have ready for GameCube's

■ Matt Casamassina, the biggest GameCube sleuth in the videogame Industry, is the editor-in-chief of IGN64.com

launch, we have been able to piece together a partial second-party contributions list, as follows. From Rare, Perfect Dark 2 and possibly Dinosaur Planet, from Silicon Knights, Eternal Darkness; from Retro Studios, Football 2002 and Thunder Rally; from NST, Wave Race GameCube, and from Factor 5, Rogue Squadron GameCube. In addition, Capcom will have Resident Evil 0, and Namco will have one of its major franchises too. But we'll have more on that in a coming issue.
NextGen

■ While Rare is working on an all-new Perfect Dark sequel for GameCube, many of the first games are N64 projects that have been upgraded. Both Resident Evil 0 and Eternal Darkness are games that are being revamped to take advantage of the new hardware, while Rare is suspected of doing the same with Dinosaur Planet
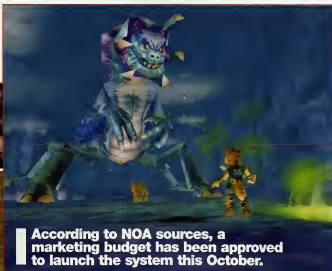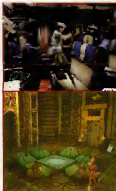
According to NOA sources, a marketing budget has been approved to launch the system this October.

04/01

PARAPPA 3? IT SEEMS TO BE

→ Sony of Japan has announced the return of our favorite optimistic dog-turned-lyrical stylist, Parappa the Rapper. The flower-dating co-creation of Rodney Greenblatt and Masaya Matsuura steps to the mic on PS2 in Japan as early as this summer while a television show based on our 2D hero begins running in Japan in April. We haven't yet heard from SCEA when the game will arrive in the United States, but if, as in the original, the game's music is done in English, a U.S. version could be turned around quickly.

SWOOSH: THE GAMES

→ If you consider that Nike may possibly spend more money on media to brand its athletic shoes than to manufacture them, it should come as no big surprise that the company may be getting into the videogame business. According to our friends in the know, a skunkworks group inside the company is looking to cobrand and develop a line of Nike games with a major publisher. But there's no word yet as to whether any major media-savvy soft drink or fast food chains are planning to enter the videogame business. We attempted to contact Pepsiman, star of Japan's not-so-great Pepsiman game, but he couldn't be reached for comment — though we're sure he's still pissed that his game isn't acknowledged in the U.S.

Smoke.

WHICH WAY DOES SNAKE SLITHER?

→ Straight from the mouth of series creator Hideo Kojima. The upcoming Xbox title, Metal Gear Solid X, will not be a port of Metal Gear Solid 3 as was previously believed. According to our sources, Metal Gear Solid X has for some time been referred to — internally at Konami — as Metal Gear 1.5, and Kojima recently confirmed to Japanese press that the Microsoft version will be a mix of the original PlayStation game and the sequel. As it stands now, the complete version of MGS2 will be available only for PlayStation 2. Kojima also stated that Metal Gear Solid 2 will be the final in the series. Considering that Kojima, after making the first two Metal Gear titles, took a break to make Policenauts and Snatcher, this only seems to make sense. How long a break will Kojima take from Snake? At this point, even he probably doesn't know.

MONKEY BOUND FOR PS2

→ Scuttlebutt among the Ewoks has it that LucasArts is testing the graphic adventure waters on PlayStation 2 with its Monkey Island series. Sources have revealed that Escape from Monkey Island, which was released over the holidays for PC and received a score of three stars in our February issue, will be coming to Sony's black box later this year. The series villain, the pirate LeChuck, is rumored to have said, "Arrrgh... Those dirty black consoles might be available by then."

The X-philes

Microsoft places its bets, but will the chips come in?

Now that Sony and EA get the credit (or the blame) for breaking Sega's console knees, the fight can really begin. Microsoft has the hardware; Sony has the mindshare; and Nintendo, as usual, has the games. Conventional wisdom says that there can't be four consoles in the market, and now we'll never know.

But it's almost a given that Xbox is a good thing for videogames. There are only a few devout skeptics out there, such as the outspoken *Crash Bandicoot* co-creator Jason Rubin; the very outspoken head of 3D Realms, George Broussard; and the Yamauchi of outspokenness, Nintendo Chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi. The rest of us welcome Microsoft as a very serious player and one of the few companies truly

capable of unseating Sony from the top of the hill.

But Xbox also brings some important consolation to the PC market. When it was announced last year that Nvidia had landed the contract for Xbox, it was followed almost immediately by the sounds of 3dfx's death rattle. While 3dfx had suffered months of mis-management before the announcement, the Xbox contract was its last hope.

So why did Nvidia get the contract? It's pretty simple actually. The proprietary chip in Xbox, code-named the NV2A, is so cutting-edge that it still only exists on paper. Although Microsoft recently downgraded

the GPU's clockspeed from 300 to 250MHz — probably for heating issues — the chip still promises performance that we find hard to believe it will deliver.

Although Nvidia wisely included an enormous memory bus of 6.4GB/sec, the massive highway will have a lot of traffic rumbling down it at high speeds. The official specs promise a pixel fill-rate of 4.0 gigapixels per second, even with two textures. No other chip has come close to delivering those numbers — not even Nvidia's next PC chip, the NV20, which won't be out until later this spring.

While those numbers sound promising, the fact that such a beast only exists on paper does

not. At the official unveiling of Xbox at CES, Bill Gates mentioned that the chips won't be put into the console until just a few weeks before they ship. While a few weeks sounds like a nice buffer, most chip "batches" take 10 to 12 weeks to go through the manufacturing process, and they inevitably have a high failure rate on the first run. Will a "few weeks" be an adequate amount of time to get enough chips ready for a successful Xbox launch?

Most of the developers we have privately spoken to are quietly confident that Microsoft can do it. The delay of the European launch until Spring 2002 gives them a little more breathing room, and some claim that the chip already exists, very close to its final, refined state. Since Microsoft has no history in the console market, it can only tout its

Will a "few weeks" be an adequate amount of time to get enough chips ready for a successful Xbox launch?

■ Jim Preston isn't just an all-around swell guy with a Ph.D. in philosophy — he's also an Xbox/PC editor for Daily Radar

superior hardware right now. Whether Xbox wins the next round of the console wars is in some ways irrelevant. As long as it remains remotely competitive, the benefits to both console and PC gamers are enormous. But if the performance, or even worse, the U.S. launch date, slips, Microsoft will have to battle perhaps its toughest enemy: its reputation. **Next**Gen
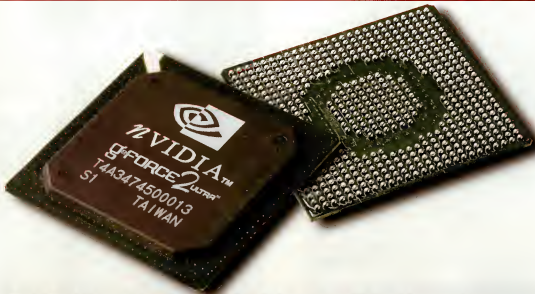
■ The NV2A's little brother, the NV20 chip (a.k.a. GeForce 2) shown here will be available for PCs this spring and will be featured in the next round of Xbox dev kits

Nintendo Readies
GBA Library

And a new handheld emerges from Korea

It's been eight months since Nintendo unveiled Game Boy Advance during last year's Spaceworld show, and although hardcore gamers are being spoiled by Dreamcast and

PS2 games, there's a definite attraction to carrying a 32-bit version of Mario Kart wherever you go. Developers love the track record of Game Boy and have jumped all over the new system. GBA doesn't launch in the U.S. until June 11, but more than 60 games

have already been announced by companies including Konami, Midway, and Namco.

"The quality of the graphics and sound should win over a much larger audience [than GBC]," predicts Dave Rushton, senior programmer for Saffire. "Improved CPU speed will add much more depth to the games, and I wouldn't be surprised to see people porting N64 games to the GBA with very little change in quality."

This excitement within the industry is driving new technologies for portable gaming, such as Graphic State's A3D 3D-graphics engine. The engine features six degrees of freedom, as well as realtime lighting and 3D collision. Graphic State has also

developed a BSP-based Raycast engine that produces fully textured pseudo-3D environments and includes a camera zoom feature for sniper weapons.

Despite Nintendo's ability to bury the now-defunct NeoGeo Pocket Color, other companies are still eyeing the handheld-gaming space. Most people have heard of Bandai's WonderSwan Color 16-bit system that's out in Japan, but there's also Korea-based Gamepark and its 32-bit

"GP32" system, as well as a rumored Panasonic handheld gaming console in the works.

Hopefully, one of these competitors will make it to the U.S. and push Nintendo and its game development partners to continue evolving the portable gaming experience. GBA's success may ultimately hinge not on its dominance over potential competitors, but its pricing structure — possibly $50 per cart, which is steep for a game that only looks as good as a game on the SNES.

— Michael Wolf

■ Gamepark's handheld features a 320x240 pixel LCD screen and a 32-bit RISC CPU

■ Nintendo will offer GBA in a variety of colors

■ Although Bakutsu Dakakusen (far left) is uncertain for a U.S. release, expect Mr. Driller, Mario Kart Advance, F-Zero, and Mario Advance for your handheld pleasure

■ ARE YOU FEELING IT?

Tactile feedback mouse offers new level of Immersion

This mouse doesn't roar — it rumbles

→ We admit it — we love force feedback. But when we first heard the term "tactile feedback mouse," we seriously doubted such a thing needed to exist. Imagine our surprise when Immersion, the company that created the force-feedback effects for Microsoft's Sidewinder flight sticks, showed up at our offices with Logitech's iFeel mouse and completely converted us imbued with Immersion's TouchSense technology, this mouse is far more than a PC-friendly joy buzzer.

The concept of the iFeel mouse is the same as any force-feedback device: to add the sensation of touch to the gaming experience. But we were shocked by the variety of effects the Immersion mouse created. Every weapon in Half-Life had a different feel. The Glock's recoil was slight and quick; the Gluon gun burst forth and then wound down, and the handy Crowbar rattled solidly in our hand. Additional sensations triggered when we took damage, or when nearby objects exploded.

TouchSense is still quite new, but it can already be patched through not always without user difficulty) into Half-Life, Unreal Tournament, MDK 2, and Elite Force, while both Tribes 2 and Return to Wolfenstein will contain support right out of the box. Westwood, Blizzard, and Maxis all have plans to use the technology,

■ Logitech's iFeel optical mouse is available in a standard model ($40) and the more ergonomic MouseMan ($60, pictured). A quarter of a million of them have already been sold

and Lionhead Studios' long-awaited Black & White will feature over 70 different tactile sensations.

Like any new idea, TouchSense faces the twofold challenge of convincing developers to adopt the technology and persuading consumers to pay for it. But based upon what Immersion has already achieved, we're confident it will succeed. Plus, the technology can be licensed and will fit into almost any peripheral. In fact, Microsoft is one of Immersion's biggest clients. Could TouchSense be headed to Xbox? We certainly hope so — Eric Bratcher
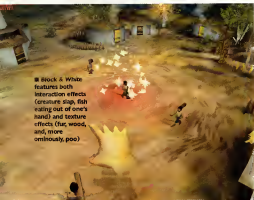
■ Black & White features both interaction effects (creature slap, fish eating out of one's hand) and texture effects (fur, wood, and, more ominously, poo)

■ GET A DEGREE IN GAME DESIGN

Meeting of the Minds

Industry's top developers gather for conference

→ Want to get up close and personal with the top developers and creative thinkers in the gaming industry? Forget all the flash of GDC and E3 — the movers and shakers have gone back to school. The Entertainment in the Interactive Age conference, held this year on the USC campus in California, featured some of the biggest names in the industry. Hal Barwood (LucasArts), Warren Spector (Ion Storm), Will Wright (Maxis), Raph Koster (Sony), and others gathered to exchange ideas with the academics, engineers, students, artists, and anyone else who wanted to show up for the free event.

The conference, which was held last year at MIT, allowed for a broad range of presentations on everything from videogames as therapy to a stunning exhibition of the next step in photorealistic graphics. But if there was a single theme during the two days of discussion, it was the elevation of the gamer to the status of "co-author" of the game.

"We only create the boundaries — the player creates the experience," said Will Wright in his keynote address. Wright's philosophy is evident in The Sims, his innovative game that provides gamers with a virtual dollhouse of characters and objects and allows gamers the freedom to do with them as they please. And if anyone needs proof that such a design philosophy can be successful, it's found in the sale of more than 3 million copies of The Sims, or in the fact that some form of the game popped up in a surprising number of presentations.

But the big news of the conference came from the host, not the participants. USC announced that it was establishing a Masters in Fine Arts degree in game design, the first of its kind in the country. Elizabeth Daley, the Dean of USC's School of Cinema-Television, told Next Gen that USC was "committed to bringing videogames into the mainstream of U.S. entertainment."

Most developers welcomed the announcement, regarding it as yet another way to get into the videogame industry. "It's great," said Warren Spector. "Whenever I have to hire someone, I often have to train them to think like a developer. A program like this will help me do that."

Despite the general success of the conference, there was still room for improvement. Touchy subjects like violence in videogames, gender issues, and the economics of all this "co-authoring" were neatly skirted. Also, there were almost no console developers to be found, with only Nintendo Director of Game Evaluation Ken Lobb representing the larger half of the industry.

Nonetheless, those who did attend valued the experience. "This is the place to be, and I plan to come back every year," said LucasArts Project Leader Hal Barwood. "If they'll have me!" — Jim Preston

■ SHOW 'EM WHAT YOU GOT

Looking to Beat the Best?

Console ranking sites show how you stack up

When you crush an NFL2K1 opponent 49-3, you know you're good. But when you demoralize a field of challengers who all think they're hot, you know you're great. Sure, Sega's pulling out of the hardware business, but the 3 million-strong Dreamcast community can still enjoy something thus far exclusive to PC gamers: climbing through the ranks and being recognized as the best. Web sites have recently emerged that create virtual arenas for Dreamcast owners, and many plan to offer PS2 and Xbox tournaments when these systems go online.

VirtualTourney.com is one new free site that enables Dreamcast gamers to participate in one-on-one matches as part of an overall tournament. Bracket winners move on to the Championship tournament, where not only can they win prizes — including cash, DVD players, and, of course, the

ubiquitous T-shirt — but earn respect and that magical fifteen minutes of fame. "Our main goal is to give people a place where they can be the best, where they can shine," says President John Filletti of his reasons for creating Virtual Tourney.

Why seek out a tournament instead of just going head-to-head with another gamer? Tournament competition lets players develop a track record of competing against, and beating, the best. "You're seeded based on previous performance, so you won't just find easy people to play against to get a win," says Filletti. "The highest-rated players compete against the other highest-rated players. It's more

like the real world — like the NCAA basketball tournament."

If you're just looking to set the record for most Quake III Arena or 4X4 Evolution victories, check out ladder sites such as Dricas World's Dreamcast Ladder (www.dcladder.com). Ladder sites rank users based on wins and losses alone and have attracted thousands of gamers. Offering rankings for all Dreamcast online games, this site fosters a community of competitive gamers focused solely on Dreamcast — and gives players a way to find other gamers hungry for a challenge.

For those who yearn for the days of Donkey Kong when your

high score spoke for itself, a couple of Dreamcast games have a built-in ranking feature that simply posts your best for all to see. Ferrari F355 Challenge and the Dreamcast port of Vanishing Point (see review, page 84) enter your scores automatically into an online ranking system. Players create a profile, then race to beat other people's times from around the world. High scores are posted on the games' ranking web sites (www.acclaim.com for Vanishing Point, and www.sega-rd2.com/f355/ranking_en/RANK/ for F355 Challenge).

What lies in store for console

ranking sites? Will this niche service inevitably expand to rival the bounty of similar sites available for PC gamers? According to Epic Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski (you may be familiar with his work on the top-selling game Unreal Tournament for the PC), the next step hinges on giving the console gamer a complete system. "Xbox has the best shot at making this a reality" suggests Bleszinski. "Having broadband capabilities and a hard drive out of the box is crucial, because console peripherals seldom do well."
— Jennifer Tsao

■ Games like NFL2K1 have sparked communities of competitive gamers

■ Virtual Tourney seeds you based on performance in prior tournaments, while Dricas World and Vanishing Point have ranking features

What do the following video game companies have in common?

Microsoft

Treyarch Inventions

Activision

Fox Interactive

Inland Productions

Mattel Interactive

Universal Interactive

Studio Gigante

WayForward Technologies

Exakt Entertainment

H2O

Disney Interactive

Artificial Mind + Movement

Zono

Kalisto Entertainment

THQ

eMusement

Conspiracy Entertainment

Ground Zero Productions

Heavy Iron Studios

TDK Mediactive

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With a rallying cry **Next Generation** gathers the forces of the hottest new games

24 ■ Shadow Hearts

28 ■ Extermination

33 ■ Bridge Commander

WARHAMMER
ONLINE

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **Climax** ■ Release Date: **2002** ■ Origin: **UK**

Goblins, Orcs, Undead, and some guy from halfway across the world who wants to kick your ass

While the figurine-based, tabletop wargame *Worhammer* may not be a mainstream phenomenon, you can pretty much be assured that, no matter when you read this article, there is a group of sweaty men somewhere gathered around an excruciatingly detailed, topographically defined map table fighting it out with fantasy armies. The game has several variants, including both a fantasy version and a futuristic one dubbed *Worhammer 40K*, and it has enjoyed success among its table-driven niche of tactical strategy gamers.

Unfortunately, though there have been several attempts to bring the various *Worhammer* licenses to consoles — in recent years, both *Worhammer: Dark Omen* and *Worhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat* were released for PlayStation — none has really captured the imagination and pushed the series into the mainstream. But with the ambitious scope of *Worhammer Online* and an unprecedented cooperation between Climax and original game creators Games Workshop, that's all going to change.

The version of the game shown to *Next Generation* was extremely early — development has only been going since March of last year — but it already looked foreboding to those of us who feel a good online game experience is a worthy tradeoff for, say, eating and sleeping. At its most basic level, the game is based on concepts that will be familiar to wargame enthusiasts. Players can utilize tactically placed armies of orcs, goblins, humans, and other nice to hack at each other over a variety of different terrain types. Only now, the meetings will take place online. "The

■ While the technology in **Warhammer** is impressive, it's the team's new ideas that promise to transform it from just an online RTS into something significantly more compelling

■ Only a few troop types were implemented in the demo we saw, but the attention to detail bodes well for fans of the Warhammer world

"You could just produce an online RTS with *Warhammer*, but we've taken it further."
— Karl Jeffrey, president, Climax

tabletop game is the main part of the game," explains Climax President Karl Jeffrey. "You've got your armies massed on each side; your opponents have their armies; you're maneuvering; and then all hell breaks loose."

Still, it's not necessarily the wargaming aspects of the title that make it so exciting. Rather, the team is adding new ideas to the mix that it hopes will lead to Worhommer

Online's breakthrough success. "You could just produce an online RTS with Worhommer," offers Jeffrey, "but we've taken it further." Beyond the basic strategy portion of the game (which as a mirror of its real-world counterpart should be compelling enough for many), there is an overlying metagame that will involve resource management, diplomacy, and trading — all in a persistent online world.

■ The map is scalable, so players can zoom in and out at any time to get the best view of the ensuing carnage

"We have this global world," explains Jeffrey, "composed of regions or kingdoms, and below that are domains, which are owned and developed by players. So there's resource management to it. You can progress to the ruler of your race and, if your race is the dominant one, then you become the emperor." Obviously, Climax is banking on the fact that most players, given the choice of winning a single battle or ruling the world, will probably go for the higher goal — or at least spend a good chunk of their lives trying.

In addition to translating the tabletop game to the online environment, the team is also focusing on making the game's framework every bit as compelling as the core gameplay experience. In what will probably be considered one of the team's boldest moves, the game is designed so everything the player needs to know is demonstrated without the usual menus,

■ Much of the game involves players moving their armies against each other in epic online battles, but resource management, trade, and diplomacy will be involved in the metagame

buttons, and pull-down bars. "We dream of a user interface in which no tutorial is necessary," says Jeffrey. "A mouse cursor, or a panel or overlay, works against the suspension of disbelief."

In order to reach this lofty goal, the Worhommer team has had to rethink some basic tenets of the realtime strategy genre. "The whole story is told with the engine," explains Jeffrey. "For example, you enter your castle and you're looking at your resources. You don't go in and click on a menu and see that you have 300 units of iron ore — you see the iron ore physically building up."

While the game is initially being developed for the PC, it's not too big a stretch to imagine the game shipping on Xbox as well. Even though the developer has first-party projects with both Sony and

Microsoft, our conversation with Jeffrey and the nature of Worhommer seem to make us think the game is heading over to the Xbox camp. "We're finding that Sony aren't really giving us the answers we want regarding broadband, but Microsoft is," admits Jeffrey. "And doing a persistent world without a hard drive is possible, but not desirable."

So will Climax be able to attain its ambitious goals? Honestly, it's probably too early to tell, but the company's vision appears to be sound, and the team is obviously well on its way to making it happen. If they do succeed, well... Let's just say we're already waiting for the first 48-hour marathon game fueled by gallons of Mountain Dew and pizzas ordered via cell phones — because that's what wargaming is all about.   — Blake Fischer/Nigel Edge

■ Abilities (such as night vision) that can only be minimally realized in the lead-figure version of Worhommer can be fully realized in the game's online counterpart

■ Your character, Urmnaf, changes into this strange skull-headed monster. As the game progresses, he'll gain new forms

■ PLAYSTATION 2

SHADOW HEARTS

■ Publisher: [ ] ■ Developer: [ ] ■ Release Date: [ ] ■ Origin: [ ]

With a retooled battle system, the *Koudelka* series rises from the grave
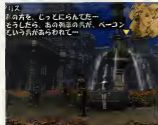
■ The game begins in Paris circa 1913 but ranges into China as well

Though the majority of survival horror titles continue to shamelessly ape *Resident Evil*, last year's *Koudelka* for PlayStation was a refreshing exception. Developed by former Square employees, the game attempted to meld the atmosphere and story of a survival horror game with the ongoing character development and strategic combat of an RPG. And it almost worked, were it not for a clunky, turn-based battle system that crippled the game's ability to maintain suspense.

This time around, *Shadow Hearts*

chronicles the odyssey of Urmnaf Bort Hyuga (a name that will definitely change during localization), a young man gifted with the macabre ability to change into various demonic and possibly undead creatures. Urmnaf is joined on his adventure by at least two companions: a mysterious woman named Ans Eliot and Roger Bacon, the ancient, eccentric hermit from Koudelka. The story has its origin in Paris during the spring of 1913, but the world map ranges all the way into China, so the scope of the plot is anybody's guess. Early glimpses of the game do, however, seem to indicate that quality cut scenes and beautiful

cinemas, which were common in *Koudelka*, will again help tell the tale.

Fortunately, Sacnoth has learned from the mistakes it made in *Koudelka* and has rebuilt the combat engine from scratch for PlayStation 2. While it is still turn-based in nature, this new, anxiety-inducing, timing-based combat system is called the Judgment Ring. Essentially, the Judgment Ring looks and works similar to how a swing meter works in a golf game. The circular gauge is divided into

■ The combat system is specifically designed to keep things a bit frantic — and it'll keep you on your toes

■ The cinemas look both lovely and unsettling, if slightly less lavish than typical Square fare
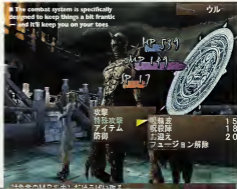
■ Battle is as strategic and tactical as RPG combat, but it still requires arcade-worthy timing and reflexes

segments, which represent different actions, such as swinging a weapon or casting a spell. During battle, an indicator quickly orbits the ring. In order to execute an attack, the player must stop the indicator in the desired segment by pressing the button at the appropriate moment. (It's basically Wheel of Fortune, but reversed. The wheel is stationary and the arrow moves, as if in orbit, around the outside edge. Nor can you afford to land on Bankrupt.) You can pull off combos and even critical hits with the proper finesse, but if you stop the indicator in the wrong place, you miss your chance to attack, and it becomes your enemy's turn.

Also new in this game are Sanity Points, which complement the more common Health and Magic Points. Exactly which actions and attacks affect these points is uncertain, but if any character's total reaches zero, you lose control over them. The Judgment Ring and Sanity Points add nerve-wracking components of chance to each battle. In fact, the ring is such an effective agent of chaos that it is

further utilized throughout the game to determine the effectiveness of healing potions and even the outcome of plot developments at certain crucial junctures.

Sacnoth is attempting nothing less than a complete head transplant with this title. But the battle system was really Koudelka's only serious flaw. If the existing body accepts this new brain and visage — well, you'll still be looking at the Bride of Frankenstein, but chances are, she'll be one hell of a date.

— Eric Bratcher

The Judgment Ring and Sanity Points add nerve-wracking components of chance to each battle.

■ Koudelka's PSX-level 3D backdrops have been replaced by robust, PS1-standard, fully 3D environments
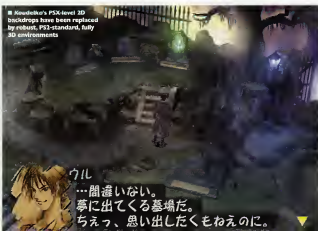
■ Urmesil is more powerful as a monster (not to mention decidedly less Square-ish. Wasn't he in The Boomer?), but it costs him valuable Sanity Points

ATTACK ATTACK ATTACK

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WORLD WAR
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■ When the camera zooms in closer, you can really see how low-res some of the textures are

■ The fully 3D nature of Extermination enables the team to add some Tomb Raider-like environment navigation puzzles to the game's mix

The screen liquid's penetrated by thermal coat, it's seen superbly as the gun's subscreen

■ PLAYSTATION 2

EXTERMINATION

■ Publisher **SCEA** ■ Developer **Deep Space** ■ Release Date **March (Japan), TBA (US)** ■ Origin **Japan**

Sony takes its first stab at survival horror on PlayStation 2

It's entirely possible that, in 2001, there will be more survival horror games released in the course of the year than in the entire history of the genre. Sony's first entry (of several on their way from the company) comes from a newly formed outside team known as Deep Space. Its first title looks promising, crossing traditional survival horror gameplay techniques with the stark atmosphere and paranoia of John Carpenter's

The Thing, adding a bit of Syphon Filter-style military action for good measure. Still, after our initial look at the game, we have to wonder whether anybody will ever be able to challenge Resident Evil's dominance of this particular niche if they only twist around the same established formulas.

Players take on the role of Dens Riley, a member of a special commando team that has been sent out to the remote Antarctic base Fort Stuart to investigate why all signs of life have suddenly disappeared. Of course, as often happens, your transport crash-lands, leaving you stranded in an area that appears to be overrun by an alien virus and aggressive mutant enemies. In fact, our initial impression of the game made it look like a more modern Blue Stinger, because the monsters you initially encounter are a lot like Climax's monstrosities, with strange mutant shapes and lots of tentacles/arms with which to hit you. Luckily, you're not entirely alone since one of your team members, Roger Grigman, will still be around to lend a hand. Presumably, players will get a chance to play Roger at some point in the game, but it is still unknown how much of a role he will actually play in the overall experience.

■ While a few of the puzzles will be your standard "get the key, open the door" affairs, we're hoping for a bit of extra creativity

Gameplay takes place in a true

Gameplay takes place in a true 3D world like Code: Veronica's. Thankfully, though, the character appears to be directionally controlled, as in Mario 64, versus Resident Evil's traditional relative control scheme. The gameplay also seems to be much more

■ To stay safe and secure, you can shoot the mutant menace with your handy sniper rifle

Extermination crosses traditional survival horror gameplay with the stark atmosphere and paranoia of John Carpenter's *The Thing.*

dynamic than in RE, as players can actually interact with the environment in a variety of different ways — jumping on platforms, climbing ladders and walls, and shimmying on pipes that hang down from the ceiling. To help players cope with the true 3D nature of the game, the camera appears to mix traditional fixed angles with a more 3D-friendly behind-the-back chase cam. There is even an MGS2-style first-person view that you can use to accurately aim your shots.

Unfortunately, much like SCEI's RPG *Dark Cloud*, Extermination shows some evidence of being a first-generation PS2 game, despite the welcome presence of anti-aliasing. The biggest strike against the game at this point is its poor textures, which aren't very detailed or

colorful. Sure the game is supposed to have a washed-out Arctic look, but right now it seems to be a little too rough, and even the lighting effects don't seem to help. In the title's defense, an SCEA representative said there will be major changes before the game's U.S. release, though we couldn't get her to spill the beans on what these changes will be.

But the Japanese release is rapidly approaching, and it remains to be seen when the U.S. version of the game will be completed. If it ships in the U.S. this year, it may find itself competing with *Run Like Hell*, *The Lost*, *Devil May Cry*, and quite possibly a new *Resident Evil* game, in what could be known as the great survival horror deluge of 2001.

— Blake Fischer/Christophe Kagotani

■ Along with the killer virus and the monsters it has spawned, you'll have to deal with environmental obstacles in the broken-down base

THE REAL FATHER OF SURVIVAL HORROR?

While his name may be synonymous with survival horror, Fujiwara Tokuroshi was actually one of the primary developers of Capcom's original *Biohazard*, as well as titles like *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* and *Megaman*. After the first *Biohazard*, he returned, it seemed, to his roots by forming *Whoopee Camp* and creating the light-hearted *Tomba!* series. But now as part of a new SCEI division dubbed *Deep Space*, Tokuroshi is once again delving into the darker side of his psyche with *Extermination*.

■ The first-person mode isn't just helpful for taking a closer look at each area — it also enables you to aim much more accurately

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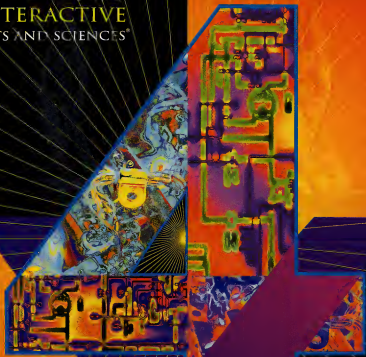
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MICHAEL LIMBER, Angel Studios

SID MEIER, Firaxis Games
DR. RAY MUZYKA, Bioware
GABE NEWELL, Valve Software
TED PRICE, Insomniac Games
MARK REIN, Epic Games
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■ The game blasts along at a solid 60fps. We hope the textures and models will be upgraded without sacrificing this speed

■ Rumble Racing seems very similar to its original PlayStation ancestor, with the addition of stunts (above)

-00.0 Tiberius (S)

MPH 181

-00.4 The Banger

RUMBLE RACING

Publisher EA Games ■ **Developer** EA Games ■ **Release Date** Summer ■ **Origin** US

This *Rollcage*-meets-*SF Rush* racer don't need no stinkin' license

Last year EA's NASCAR Rumble deftly straddled the line between arcade racing and the over-the-top, power-ups found in Rollcage. For those unfamiliar with this first game, think San Francisco Rush (shortcuts and wild car physics) with collision enhancing bumpers, freeze bombs, and the odd tornado. While the game was easily mastered, its fresh approach remained quite satisfying. Rumble Racing, the newest, PS2-enabled evolution of this concept, is already well on its way to blazing through its qualifying lap.

This new iteration takes a page from SSX's design doc, frequently launching the vehicles into the air, enabling them to pull stunts like corkscrews and barrel rolls to earn turbo bonuses for increased speed. On the technical side, the engine runs at a solid 60fps without any of the erratic shifts in resolution or framerate that plagued NASCAR 2001. However, the textures seem so far appear bland, and both the models and environments look more like a Dreamcast game than a cutting-edge PS2 title. Finally, several features from the first title (manual transmission, adjustable power-up frequency, CPU/player cooperative races) are absent thus far. Still, there's plenty of time to add features and graphical polish before its release.

In fact, the biggest challenge faced by Rumble Racing may be a matter of timing; its summer launch date is precariously close to those for both Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec and Twisted Metal Black — two high-profile, eagerly awaited releases that will offer serious competition. So while this title may not take the checkered flag, we remain optimistic that it can at least make an enjoyable race out of it.
— Eric Bratcher

■ Easily the most graphically impressive power-up is the Twister, which can only be used by the player

Lap: 01:22:06
Total: 01:22:06
4/5

-00.0 The Banger

1/3
182

WHEREFORE ART THOU, NASCAR?

Although you can't race as Jeff Gordon this time around, there's no bad blood between EA and NASCAR. Rather, the license was removed from this title to make room for deeper gameplay, including stunt performance and new vehicle types, such as muscle cars (left) and pickup trucks (right)

-00.4 Mantle
137

■ Bridge Commander will give armchair captains everywhere a chance to see if they've got what it takes

BRIDGE COMMANDER

■ Publisher Activision ■ Developer Totally Games ■ Release Date Summer ■ Origin US

Boldly going where no *Star Trek* game has gone before — to the bridge

■ As captain, you'll have to learn the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the personalities and quirks, of every member of your crew

➜ With the possible exception of "Bond, James Bond," no phrase can stir the soul of a pop culture nerd like being able to lean forward and sternly intone, "Engage!" But now, thanks to Activision and Totally Games, you're about to get your chance.

As the title implies, *Bridge Commander* is played from within the bridge of a Galaxy class ship like Next Generation's Enterprise-D), and the heart of the game, played in realtime, is built around interacting with the bridge officers. So when you need to move the ship out of orbit, you have to turn to the helmsman and issue the command to "lay in a new course." Likewise, you listen to the reports of the science officer to find out what the latest scans reveal and rely on the skill of your tactical officer during battle. Crew members have their own individual personalities, and part of the game is learning their responses in a given situation.

The screenshots we've seen so far look gorgeous and fully steeped in the *Star Trek* universe (with a few mild exceptions — see sidebar). In fact, during combat you can expect to see consoles explode and crewmembers thrown about, exactly as depicted on the shows.

Totally Games likes to boast that these are the most detailed ship models ever used in a game, and so far we have no reason to dispute this. At various times (and especially in the proposed multiplayer modes) you'll also get up close with Klingon, Romulan, and Cardassian vessels as well, both inside and out.

Further, in addition to your own crew, you'll also have a chance to speak and work with both Captain Picard and Commander Data, with voices supplied by Patrick Stewart and Brent Spiner. At this stage, *Bridge Commander* appears well on its way to continuing the trend started by *Elite Force* and *Starfleet Command* — in other words, *Star Trek* games that don't suck.

— *Jeff Lundrigon*

■ Most of the game is played from this perspective — exactly the view from the captain's chair

POLICE

RANK 75 TH.

WILD POINT 133,336 PTS

100 km/h

CRASH!!!

Wild Riders offers players multiple routes for each track. Of course, like any racer worth its salt, some of the shortcuts will place you in unusual circumstances
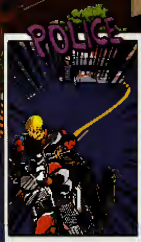
■ ARCADE

WILD RIDERS

■ Publisher **Sega** ■ Developer **Wow Entertainment** ■ Release Date **Q2 (Japan)** ■ Origin **Japan**

You're not tagging the walls, but the police are still out to get you. Go figure

At first glance, it almost looks like Wild Riders is a sequel of sorts to Jet Grind Radio. The source of the confusion is obvious. Both are Sega-published titles that are based on cel-shaded renderers (though in typical developer fashion, Wow Entertainment has branded their look "Anime Polygon"), and both prominently feature players fleeing from the authorities. To make such a comparison, however, is only to scratch the surface of both games. In truth, Sega's newest Naomi 2 arcade effort looks like it'll have more in common with Crazy Taxi than the mission-based tagging action of Jet Grind. Oh, and did we mention that this is by a completely different team?

At its core, Wild Riders is really just a racing game based on evasion and pursuit. Players are cast in the role of one of four playable characters — each a gang member on the run from the police and an ace motorcyclist. An

While Jet Grind Radio successfully imitated the look of a Saturday morning cartoon, Wild Riders features a rougher, almost comicbook feel. The panels showing character reactions accent this style

Players will be given onscreen cues whenever there's an obstacle for them to get past

onscreen gauge, cleverly rendered as a pair of handcuffs that draw ever closer, demonstrates the distance between player and pursuer, with the object of the game being to maintain your lead at any cost. The courses don't offer the complete freedom of Wow's previous title, LA Rider, but players do get a choice of routes throughout the game, and there is much more to do than simply stay away from the police.

Players control the onscreen action through actual handlebars built into the coin-op cabinet. The handlebars offer conventional left/right directional controls (which are useful for dodging all types of roadway obstacles), while pushing and pulling back on the handlebars enables the onscreen rider to slide or jump in response to onscreen cues. Much like in Shenmue's quick time events, players will be

given warning when they have to slide under or jump over obstacles, such as moving trucks, police brigades, and movable bridges. Successful navigation of these events will further increase the player's distance from the pursuing police forces, while failure will rapidly reduce the chance of evading them. Then, at the end of each race, players are awarded a letter grade, as in Crazy Taxi, from A to D.

Technically speaking, Wild Riders is actually quite a step above its Dreamcast-based brethren. One of only four announced games running on the new Naomi 2 board — the others are Club Kart Racing, Virtua Striker 3, and Virtua Fighter 4 — it can tap almost four times as much power as Dreamcast-based Naomi games, at a fraction of the cost of the pricey (and difficult to program) Hikaru board. While the screenshots may make the game appear visually simple, the power of this new board should be pretty evident when the screen fills up with tons of things at once. And trust us, from what we've seen so far, the amount of action onscreen is far greater than anything we've seen on the Dreamcast.

Unfortunately, so far we've only seen video footage and until we actually get to sit down and play through a level or two, it's impossible to determine if the game properly strikes the same balance between visuals and frenetic gameplay as Crazy Taxi or Jet Grind Radio. But as a showcase of what can be done with Naomi 2 it definitely impresses so far

— Blake Fischer/Christophe Kagotani

The gap between riders and pursuers is shown at the top of the screen by a moving gauge. When this reaches zero, it's game over

THE XBOX GAMES ARRIVE

We pull the curtain up to reveal five of the system's first games

So is Xbox the developer's dream system Microsoft would lead us to believe it is? As the Magic 8-Ball might tell you, signs point to yes. At no other time have we been able to look at games for a next-generation system still seven to nine months from launch and see not only improved graphics, but working examples of advanced concepts and breakthrough designs. We were actually shown, and in some cases played, working gameplay levels.

The proof is here, in Munch's Oddysee, Bounty Hunter, Malice, New Legends, and Mad Dash — the first five Xbox games we've been able to get our hands on. The system has already enabled developers to move the state of game design beyond the stale concepts and limitations of last-generation hardware. In the hands of the right developers, there's no question Xbox development kits can provide the ammo Microsoft needs to compete against GameCube and PlayStation 2.

The games revealed in the following pages are just the first of many that will be shown this year (Microsoft has intimated that some heavy-duty titles will be announced and shown at March's Tokyo Game Show and May's E3.) If you still don't think Microsoft stands a chance in this market, take a look at these first Xbox games. Your opinions may change.

Munch's Oddysee ..40
The third adventure from Oddworld Inhabitants stars a new character in a startlingly realistic 3D world. See why this is the game Xbox could handle that PS2 could not.

Malice 44
How many other games can you name in which a bell-bottomed girl with a giant hammer has to become a goddess to save a world that's already been destroyed?

Mad Dash......................47
Crystal Dynamics bursts from the starting blocks with this fast-paced launch title that melds the speed and action of kart racing with hip, platformer-style characters.

Bounty Hunter........50
The world's first outer-space dogfighting sim, first-person gunfighting sim, first-person gunfighting shooter, Spaghetti Western action adventure. In space. Confused? Read on.

New Legends 54
Classic beat-'em-up game mechanics are being re-invented by the same designers who made Jedi Knight such a screaming good time.

Profile

Lorne Lanning 56
Meet the man who jumped from the Good Ship Sony into the safe harbor of Microsoft — his games are like no one else's, and neither are his outspoken opinions.

■ QUITE A TRIP

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants ■ Release Date: Fall ■ Origin: US

Now in vast 3D environments — it's really an odd world after all

Those perceptive gamers who were able to look past the 2D graphics of Abe's Oddysee and Abe's Exoddus found themselves rewarded by a game series filled with interesting characters and often startlingly unique gameplay elements. With the advent of next-generation systems, developer Oddworld Inhabitants has spent the last two years crunching code to bring Abe to life in a 3D environment, all the while expanding on the unique concepts from the original two games with a design and story as ambitious as any title we've seen in recent years.

The game's exquisitely rendered opening cut scene introduces Munch. He's from an aquatic species, the Gabbits, which has been fished to the point near-extinction — in fact, he's the last of his kind. When he too is finally captured, a pair of corporate mad scientists (called Vykkers) experimentally fit him with a brain implant that gives him the power to control machinery. The game begins as Munch attempts to escape from the lab, with Abe along to help.

Setting the backstory aside, it's always been a bit unclear as to how the game will actually play, even for those who have been following this title's progress since its inception. But the mystery was solved when, upon our arrival at Oddworld Inhabitants' office, the quick tour of the premises given by company Cofounder President/visionary Lorne Lanning ended right in front of an Xbox dev kit with a functional game up and running. A detailed, realtime outdoor

■ The vaguely fish-like Munch is just the latest of Oddworld's decidedly unique character designs

■ Players leading a group of Mudokons (shown here) will be able to issue attack commands, whereupon the Mudokons will attack their oppressors

You can expect a certain amount of action along with the puzzle-solving elements that have been retained from the first two games
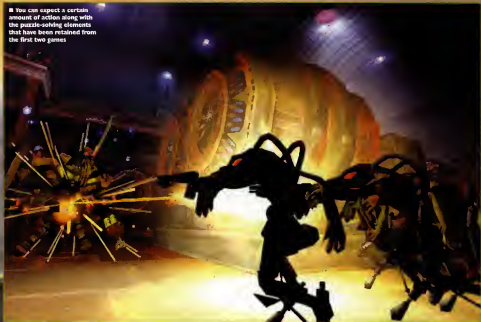
environments stretched across the monitor. Abe stood among green rolling hills and valleys, with other Mudokons visible in the background. Visually, the landscape is 100% Oddworld, but the game mechanics are not unlike Mario 64, with a camera that does a modern job of taking care of itself.

Munch's Oddysee takes place in both indoor and outdoor environments, as players juggle between the roles of both Abe and Munch. The tasks players face are not unlike those from the first two games — friends need to be rescued, and through Oddworld's innovative GameSpeak system, you'll need to recruit and manage groups of NPCs to meet your objectives. Specifically, Abe will again have to help out his fellow Mudokons and get them to safety. Munch, on the other hand, must save a new species called

Wuzzles — cute, furry little balls with eyes (cute, that is, until they show their teeth). In gameplay terms, Wuzzles function not unlike the power-ups in old shooters like Lifeforce or Solomander in that the more you have with you, the more effective you become. Abe still has his special chanting power that enables him to possess enemy characters, which are altered slightly for a 3D environment such that now you need to guide a "possession bubble" into contact with the enemy you want to possess.

So what about the much touted "living

world" aspects of the game? They're still there, and in fact that's where much of the resource collection comes into play. The game features two kinds of currency: Spooce, a natural resource, is a spiritual commodity that Abe can use to buy power-ups at vending machines; Moolah is the financial currency of the Sligs, Glukkons, Vykkers, and other enemies. (Collecting Moolah is of equal importance because when Abe possesses an enemy character, he can use it to upgrade weapons.)

Interestingly, the game's world changes to

Abe demonstrates his aerial move. To his right, a power-up vending machine dispenses "Bounce!" — the ability to jump much higher than normal

Abe and Munch can actually take damage in the game — so they'll no longer be the victims of one-hit kills

■ Enemies aren't always going to be easy targets — some carry shields

The tasks players will face are not unlike those from the first games — friends need to be rescued, and through the use of Oddworld's innovative GameSpeak system, you'll need to recruit and manage groups of NPCs to meet your objectives.

reflect how well you perform. Lanning explains that the worse you do, the more the enemies deplete the environment. A skilled player will ultimately bring about a beautiful, natural environment, while players barely hanging in there will watch as a wasteland spreads before their eyes.

Anyone who thinks that Oddworld is all about fancy artwork and story and not about gameplay would be completely off-base. Throughout our visit, Lanning was intently focused on discussing how the game plays. For example, he told us that when Abe possesses an enemy equipped with a gun, the design takes full advantage of Xbox's dual analog controller, including its feature of buttons built into each analog stick. The left analog stick steers the character's movement while the right directs its aim, and you only need to press down on the right stick to begin shooting. "It's just like playing Robotron," Lanning says.

Controlling Abe and Munch works in much the same way. Pressing down on the left analog stick puts Abe into "sneak" mode, and he can sneak faster or slower based on the degree to which the analog stick is moved. Lanning is also in the process of designing some new, unique modes of transportation within the game's world, and even talks of adding a bit of Asteroids-style gameplay. But as the game has to be ready in time for the Xbox launch, he admits that he's "not sure we're going to get flying vehicles into this one."

The partnership between Microsoft and Oddworld Inhabitants has proven to be extremely beneficial to the game's development. Remember that Microsoft has been in the software business since 1975, and it's learned a few things about making customers happy on the road to world domination. "We've gotten invaluable feedback from some of the focus testing Microsoft has done with Munch," Lanning says. This focus testing, according to Lanning, has been an integral part of the process in streamlining a number of elements as they move toward completion for the fall launch. Much of what Lanning called the "high-minded concepts" of the game have been simplified, so as not confuse players or get in the way of the gameplay experience. For example, Abe was originally going to free, in indoor and outdoor environments, but it became apparent through focus testing that players were confused about which Mudokons were already free, and which were still slaves.

Subsequently, the design was simplified in order to make the distinction clear: "If Mudokons are inside they're slaves," Lanning explains. "If they're outside, they're free."

And this change was made even though it meant losing one in-game image Lanning was particularly fond of showing: enslaved Mudokons cutting down trees. "You need to be able to let go of the stuff you love if it

■ OK, so Munch isn't the prettiest creature who ever walked (or swam), but that's no reason for his species to be driven to extinction

■ It's the company's first game in 3D, and it's quite possibly one of the most ambitious game designs we've ever seen

isn't working for everyone else," he insists.

It's a slow week if Lanning only works 70 hours — which is no surprise, given that in the course of more than two years, his game has jumped around among three different publishers and two systems. In the transition from PlayStation 2 to Xbox, the company had to scrap much of the specially developed graphics code Sony's console

requires. However, the loss was relatively painless because, as it turns out, the Xbox chipset can handle all those features itself.

Chances are you'll never have the opportunity to meet Lorne Lanning or discuss his vision for his games. But you only need to spend a little time with his last two titles to understand why so much buzz was generated when Munch's Oddysee defected

to Xbox. Quite simply, few developers are capable of what Oddworld Inhabitants is building. Of those few, we have yet to find one that promises as dynamic a set of characters or as compelling, even morally significant, a story. Oddworld's goals go beyond creating an incredibly enjoyable experience to kicking down the walls that keep this medium boxed in. — Tom Russo

■ A GODDESS IN THE MAKING

MALICE:
A DARK AND COMIC FAIRY TALE

■ Publisher. **TBA** ■ Developer. **Argonaut** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Ori ■ UK

Speak softly and carry a big damn hammer

→ Microsoft used the Winter CES in Las Vegas a few months ago to unveil all sorts of Xbox news, but one of the things that wowed the crowd the most — more than the final specs, more than the shape of the case — was Argonaut's demo for Malice. Perhaps suspiciously patterned after Microsoft's own

Raven demo, it depicted a small girl clutching a big hammer and controlling an even bigger steampunk-style robot.

But this time, there's a real game behind the image. Malice is the adventure of Alice, whom Argonaut Producer Designer Herman Serrano gleefully describes as a "Temporal-Deity-Paradox." It would seem that the

game begins with the world being destroyed, and so, according to Serrano, Alice's goal is "to figure out what destroyed the world, stop it from happening in the various timelines, and become a Superpower in the process!"

And here's where the hammer comes in. Throughout the game, as she skips around the various time periods, Alice finds and learns to use both elemental magic and three items: the Mace of Clubs, the Quantum Tuning Fork, and the Clockwork

■ Alice will have to face down the minions of the insane Dog God, as well as various and sundry other creatures — what's a time-hopping girl to do?
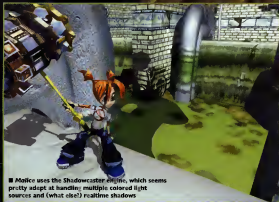
■ Malice uses the Shadowcaster engine, which seems pretty adept at handling multiple colored light sources and (what else!) realtime shadows
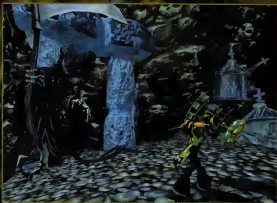
Hammer. Each has its own distinct set of skill moves and can be powered up and upgraded as you play. And you'll need it too, since it turns out the evil behind the universal destruction is malice incarnate, the Dog God, and its legion of Crow Militia. To hope to defeat this nuclear-powered mad god, Alice will, by the end of the game, have to become a goddess herself.

Malice is intended mostly as an action game. The controls will, one hopes, be rather simple, involving Alice smashing her way through the Crow Militia and other assorted bad guys. "Attacks cover either 90, 180, or 360 degrees in front of you," Serrano explains, "so you can just steam in and do some major damage. That said, combos need a little skill to execute."

The combo system is based on the five classic Chinese elements (oddly enough, exactly the same mythology used in New Legends — see page 54): Earth, Water, Metal, Wood, and Fire. Alice must learn to control the first four elements, while Fire represents the Dog God and the forces she battles against. Each combination of the

Clockwork Hammer and an elemental spell type results in different kind of spell, which can be leveled up. For example, using Metal magic calls up (and if you get the idea from these spell names that the game won't take itself too seriously, you're right) first the Hammer-Storm, then the Mow-Omatic,

and, finally, the Giant Robot.

Hence, the big steampunk fellow in the demo shown at CES. When asked if he's tired of answering people's suspicions about whether the demo was pre-rendered, Serrano merely smiles. "It's been kind of fun, actually," he says. "It's 100% realtime, so

■ The object to Alice's right is one of the "Secondary Clockwork Computer Terminals," which she uses to program new moves and spells into the hammer

■ As our typically eerie pals come swooping from a giant robot (especially) short one

Ah, those flashing green eyes, that spiky hair, those bell-bottomed jeans, the slightly frightening grin — Alice is truly a character for the new millennium

we're pretty pleased that people think it's so polished. And yes," he adds, "it is representative of how the game will look."

Malice uses Argonaut's own Shadowcaster engine. According to Serrano, "We've been working on it for about 18 months now, well before we were lucky enough to bring it to the Malice design last year." The engine's true strength is in the number of light sources it can handle at once, as well as (ahem) casting multiple realtime shadows. Other features include support for high-end bump mapping, as well as per-pixel-controlled, Phong-based specular highlights. This last is nifty because it enables a great deal of detail, since a

single high-res texture can be used for a large object, while the plastic and metal parts will still look completely different thanks to the way the highlights fall.

And from the screens we've seen so far, Malice looks very good indeed, with quite a lot of dramatic, colored lighting. "The engine correctly handles shadows from multiple lights," Serrano insists. "It blends the color the right way based on which lights are blocked. Self-shadowing is expensive — it burns fill rate. It's really more a question of how much speed can we afford to lose in any particular area. There are less 'crowded' areas in the game where multiple realtime lights are currently being cast, and you'll

definitely see those in the final game."

Also in the final game will be a number of odd NPCs, just to keep things lively. These include Attila the Shun'd, hip lord of the undead; the tequila-guzzling shaman GloWur'ms; Death himself, who (don't you know?) hates paperwork; a 400-year-old witch who eats flies; and many others ("too many to mention here," Serrano says). As we posited earlier, this game appears not to be taking itself too seriously.

Which is all to the good. One thing many of the Xbox games seem to be lacking is not so much a sense of style as much as a sense of personality — perhaps, even, a sense of gleeful fun. And once you look past the steampunk robot and notice the hell-bottomed, big-headed little girl at the controls, you get the idea that's exactly what Malice will bring to the table.

— Jeff Lundrigon

This diminutive Queen of Hunt Trauma's weapons include the Clockwork Hammer and the Mace of Clubs, but she can also cast spells

■ Splitscreen is already up and running, and Crystal is even considering implementing support for Xbox's broadband adapter

MAD DASH

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **US**

Will you run wild for this genre-bending combat racer?

The furthest along of any Xbox title we've yet seen, *Mad Dash* is a hybrid game: part platformer, part kart racer — all Xbox-exclusive. The basic idea — cartoon animals racing on foot over branching routes — is nearly identical to 989's forgotten flop, *Running Wild*. However, Crystal has tricked out the concept to the Nth (or Xth, in this case) degree, adding hand-to-hand combat reminiscent of *Road Rash*, SSX-style stunt segments, and the kind of explosive power-ups usually reserved for vehicular combat titles.

Choosing the proper path is a key to victory in any racing game, but in *Mad Dash*, it may come back to simply incapacitating your opponents. According to Director Glen Schofield, "We give players some routes to load up on power-ups, then bring them back together and let them duke it out." *Mad Dash's* selection of weaponry is a bit more unusual than your average smart bomb. For example, a power-up that creates a wall will unroll like a ribbon behind the player. Or you can simply throw punches or take an opponent down with a flying tackle.

Every character also has unique attacks: Ash the dragon tries to incinerate other racers, and Spunx, a mangy yellow lab not escaped from a perfume factory, wields a number of olfactory assaults. As comprehensive as this battle system appears, Crystal was only just beginning to place power-ups on the tracks, so the final balance between racing and combat isn't yet clear. But environmental hazards were placed, such as rolling boulders and TNT that

■ The environments range from wide-open desert areas to underwater tubeways and dense jungles

■ Even indoors, Gliders like Zero G can gain access to paths out of reach by other racers

■ Each race will feature two to four competitors

■ A huge portion of the game is choosing your route, be it airborne or ground-bound

can destroy a bridge at the exact moment an opponent reaches it.

In the nine initially selectable combatants, Crystal's focus is to create characters that are simultaneously hip, fresh, and endowed with unique abilities that will enhance gameplay. "We have Dashers, Bashers, and Gliders," clarifies Schofield, a veteran of such Crystal projects as the *Gex* series, *Akuji the Heartless,* and *Walt Disney World Racing.* Sid, an alley cat in athletic shoes, is a Dasher, so he's very quick and able to run up steeper slopes than his competitors. Chops, a warthog who looks like a biker, is a Basher and thus is able to smash through obstacles, uncovering new routes or revealing hidden power-ups. Lastly, there are Gliders, like Zero G, a furry riff on Buzz Lightyear, who can take to the air in order to circumvent entire sections of the race course. There will be up to four combatants in each race, and there are additional enemies as well — certain tracks have unfriendly indigenous inhabitants, and the minions of Hex (the game's evil mastermind, Think Cortex,) are all over the place.

The tracks themselves are Looney Tunes-ish, running the gamut from a desert oasis filled with dinosaur bones to an underwater tube world. They're also enormous. "Nine courses doesn't sound like a lot," Schofield explains, "but these are huge, and they don't loop back on themselves. You're looking at about 7-minute tracks."

We played the snow level, which begins on a mountainside and descends into a town, past a lakeshore, through caves, down a huge run, across a harbor (which required swimming or leaping from boat to boat) back into the town, over a river, and down another huge run to the finish line. Every track will feature sections — in this example, the huge runs — that enable players to slide and pull tricks commonly found in snowboarding games, which will earn them extra speed.

Of course, no discussion of an Xbox game would be complete without marveling over the system's immense technological horsepower. Environments in *Mad Dash* feature hundreds of thousands of polygons and are full of smoothly curved surfaces and wild color palettes. Bump mapping and reflection mapping are already functional, and texture layering is next. The character models are similarly beefy. "Gex, for example, was 600 polys," Schofield points out. "These guys are about 2900."

■ Some surfaces — soft snow, for instance — will be slower than other surfaces, like ice

■ The Tiki forest is the first level in the game and sets the tone with its colorful environments
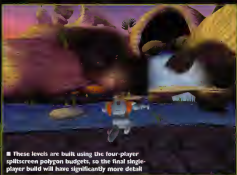
■ These levels are built using the four-player splitscreen polygon budgets, so the final single-player build will have significantly more detail

■ The camera often gives a clear view of the characters' faces, though this angle will probably be saved for the replay mode

When we saw the game running between 30 and 40 frames per second, it was doing so while continually drawing the entire level, without a single line of optimization. The final framerate will dramatically exceed this, even in four-player splitscreen mode.

The most exciting thing about *Mod Dash* is that it reinforces what the Xbox's team has promised all along — Microsoft's dedication to seeing true console-style games on its PC-derived Xbox. Anyone still concerned that Xbox will become the home to a deluge of PC ports has nothing to worry about if *Mod Dash* is any indication — this is a console game all the way. And on top of that, it looks to be a damn good one.

— Eric Bratcher

■ Neither textures nor lighting are final at this point, but this lava waterfall already looks amazing

■ SHOOT TO KILL

BOUNTY HUNTER

■ Publisher: **Crave** ■ Developer: **Warthog** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **UK**

Half-Life meets *Wing Commander* in a game
that radically defies the one-genre limit

➜ With all of the next-generation
rendering engines, graphics
hardware, and game consoles, it's
odd that the first-person shooter genre
hasn't evolved much since 1998's *Half-Life*.
There have been a few technical
innovations Red Faction's GeoMod engine
with its destructible environments and
Quake III's amazing renderer. But the core
experience hasn't really taken any bold
steps forward. That's what the guys at
Warthog must have been thinking when
they came up with Bounty Hunter — a
game that places you in the shoes of a 31st-
century gunman and blends first-person
shooting with space flight and vehicular
mayhem for the complete action-
adventure experience.

If this ambitious design sounds like
science fiction, it's not — we got to sit
down and play an early version of the
game. First, we took control of a spaceship
and had to dogfight our way through a
wave of enemies, after which we flew into
the docking bay of a large space station. At
that point, the in-game character let go of
the onscreen flight yoke, pulled out a gun,
and exited the ship into the hangar. This
was done with no pause or loading, and at
no point were we not fully in control. After
we exited our ship, we went about our
first-person mission objective, which was to
rescue a hostage from the clutches of a
religious cult.

Considering the many different gaming
modes and the enabling technology each
requires, there is the danger that this game
could end up being just another expensive
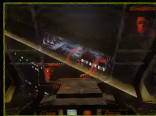
gimmick. But Warthog's designers are determined to make sure that each aspect of the game is compelling throughout. Players take on the role of Del Kruger, a bounty hunter for hire who must come to grips with his own haunted past. (In a unique twist, the first mission, which takes place ten years prior to the rest of the game, actually serves as the backstory.) Del exists in a universe that may look oddly familiar to some.

"It's Spaghetti Western meets *Star Wars*," boasts Crave Executive Producer Mike Arkin as he showed us the conceptual drawings for the characters and vehicles in the game. "Even our hero's outfit is very Clint Eastwood." Indeed, Kruger's attire includes a metal cowboy hat and armor piece that resembles the poncho Eastwood wore in *A Fistful of Dollars.* The Western influence also seeps into the game's landscape and mission design rather well, so expect to deal with some rustlers along with the usual cast of futuristic mercenaries.

The storyline will also progress entirely

> ## "It's Spaghetti Western meets *Star Wars*, even our hero's outfit is very Clint Eastwood."
>
> — Mike Arkin, executive producer, Crave

in-game, and while many levels will have to be completed in a specific order, there is some non-linearity in how players select each mission. "One of the things I liked about *Half-Life*," comments Arkin, "was all of the scripted stuff and story that was told throughout the level, and we'll do a lot of that — even more than [Valve] did."

A good example of the scripting planned for the final game is described to us as part of a level called "Clear and Present Ranger." Set in a narrow street, vehicles transporting several VIPs are ambushed by enemies attacking from the rooftops with rocket launchers and laser guns. Your job is to run into the middle of the fray, secure each VIP, and get them out. "There are going to be lots of interactions with NPCs and lots of scripted events," Arkin promises. "I'm talking about levels where there will be 15 to 20 scripted events continuously going on."

As the game is solely designed for Xbox, the technology behind it is already impressive — despite the fact that the version we played was several months old. (The team is currently in the process of rewriting the renderer to take better advantage of Xbox's functions like pixel and vertex shaders.) In fact, according to Arkin, the final game will look twice as good as what we can show here. Many pieces of the final game were notably absent, including *Soldier of Fortune*-style enemy dismemberment.

"You'll be able shoot someone and shoot their arm off, and there'll be bones sticking out," Arkin says. Robust enemy AI, meanwhile, will not only enable Warthog designers to assign an inherent amount of intelligence to each NPC — it'll also factor
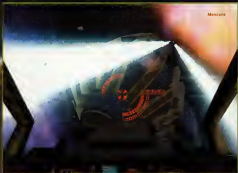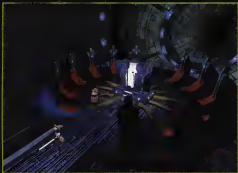
in things like group morale.

Even more impressive will be the promised scope of the game levels. "Missions are huge," Arkin says. "Some of the levels are four to five times as large as current state-of-the-art first-person shooter levels." He adds that they'll also be complex. "Don't think that the missions are 'just fly somewhere, shoot some guys, get back in your ship, and fly back,'" he continues. "Some missions go back and forth between flying and shooting two or three times."

If there's a strike against *Bounty Hunter* at this early stage, it's that it still looks a little bit more like a PC game than what we expect on consoles, despite the fact that it was running on an Xbox development kit. Arkin assures us that the team at Warthog is well aware of the differences between the two formats (as they recently ported *Starlancer* to Dreamcast) and will make sure the game surpasses what console players expect from their games.   — Bloke Fischer

"There's going to be lots of interactions with NPCs and lots of scripted events. I'm talking about levels where there will be 15 to 20 scripted events continuously going on."

— Mike Arkin, executive producer, Grove

■ "Did you order a spear? Oops, well, sorry about that..."

■ FROM THE DESIGNERS OF JEDI KNIGHT

NEW LEGENDS

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Infinite Machine ■ Release Date: Fall ■ Origin: US

The art of war goes Xbox

The one major question still revolving around Xbox is, obviously, "What about the games?" And developers like Infinite Machine are (slowly) providing the answer. Founded by Justin Chin and Che-Yuan Wang, both fresh from working on Jedi Knight at LucasArts, Infinite Machine now employs 31 programmers, artists, and designers, all plugging away on New Legends, an action title set in China a hundred or so years into the future.

Originally conceived for PC but now 100% retooled for Xbox, New Legends tells the story of Sun Soo, a warrior prince and son of a feudal lord. After many, many years of war, China has once more become divided into the fiefdoms of its ancient past. As the clans remain wary of each other, an evil warlord, Xao Gon, and his half-demon offspring attempt to seize power and conquer the country. The game begins with Soo's homeland falling to Gon, and over the

course of the game's planned 34 levels, Soo must defeat Gon's demon children and recover the five "Forbidden Blades of Heaven" to free the land of evil.

In terms of moving the game from PC to Xbox, the process has essentially been painless. New Legends uses a highly modified (and in many areas, completely rewritten) version of the Unreal engine, which Infinite Machine has had little problem adapting. "The biggest hurdle was the

■ Sun Soo, scion of a Chinese feudal lord, really knows how to liven up a party with his devastating Axehammer attacks

■ The engine uses a skeletal animation system, which results in appreciably smooth movement and the flexibility of animating different limbs individually

■ Some weapons are powerful but slow; others are fast but short-ranged — guess which category this weapon falls into?

controller — in figuring out what we needed to do to make it fun using a controller," Chin explains. "We actually changed the combat system. We revamped everything. We're all Xbox — everything is for Xbox."

At its heart, New Legends is a third-person, 3D action game. Using a combination of melee weapons and "tech" weapons (guns and rocket launchers), Soo battles against numerous opponents as he works his way through China's varied landscapes. The combat system enables Soo to use a weapon in each hand — a sword in his right and a hand cannon in his left, for example — although certain weapons require the use of both hands. A total of four weapons can be carried at any given time.

The control scheme reflects this two-fisted gameplay dynamic, using only four buttons: right-hand attack, left-hand attack,

a special attack, and a jump button. In the case of two-handed weapons, the right button is a regular attack and the left is an alt-fire. In addition, as he fights and defeats his opponents, Soo slowly fills his "Chi Meter" which can be used to unleash devastating special attacks. There is a total of 19 weapons, each of which has its own unique set of moves.

But perhaps the most interesting thing is that Soo will not be making this journey

alone. He will be accompanied at various times by sidekicks — non-player characters who will help out and perform various tasks. Most notable is Zhang, a crusty older man who carries Soo's extra weapons in a large (and presumably rather heavy) pack on his back. However, there's no need to worry that Soo's companions will, in Dalkatana-fashion, get stuck in doors or end the game when they get shot. Their actions are mostly scripted, and they're around strictly to advance the story, give advice, and assist Soo.

In fact, Chin explains it, "We had a number of ideas, ideas about the kind of combat we wanted to do, the idea of managing a team, and that quickly evolved. I say 'quickly,' but it took a while. The melee system has come a long way, and it's changed over the years, but it definitely has the original roots. We stuck to the gameplay concepts." New Legends was designed from the ground up around its gameplay elements — the story and setting support the action, not the other way around.

And if Xbox is to succeed as a gaming platform, that's exactly the kind of thinking it needs. — Jeff Lundrigan

The control scheme reflects this two-fisted gameplay dynamic, using only four buttons

■ Soo has an arsenal of up to 19 weapons. Each unleashes a different kind of attack — all of which are lethal

■ On his journey, Soo will be accompanied at various times by sidekicks — sidekicks you won't have to babysit

■ **PROFILES IN ODDNESS**

A CONVERSATION WITH
LORNE LANNING

One man's pursuit of better games — and a better game industry

When Lorne Lanning and the developers at Oddworld Inhabitants abruptly abandoned PlayStation 2 in favor of Xbox, it caused quite a stir. Now, with Munch's Oddysee coming down the stretch on its long production cycle, it seemed like the perfect time to have a talk with the man who introduced GameSpeak (and sewn-up lips) to the videogame world.

Next Gen: So you want to be there on Xbox at launch?

Lorne Lanning: Absolutely. We're exclusive on Xbox for the next four titles, and we're very excited about that. When we came off PS2, we were so frustrated. Every time you hit an obstacle that you think the hardware should handle, you're slashing that out of your features budget because now one of your guys has to try to write this thing for mip-mapping, which every video card in the world does, except this machine doesn't. And you'd ask, "How is that possible, that you would overlook this?" It was simple, stupid stuff, and we'd wind up having to invest our game budget in non-game code. The ideal way to design for a platform like that is probably to figure out what the capability of the machine is first, and then build your game around that. But if you have a vision for a game that you're striving for, and you're hoping that the technology supports it, it's a lot more difficult.

But Xbox is so much more powerfully designed that you can plan for more of the features you wanted, and less of the hiccups and hidden obstacles. On the basis of what would make it easier for developers, this is a smartly designed system.

NG: Did you have to write stuff for PS2 that you don't need now on Xbox?

LL: Of course. This is what we were upset about, because we want to build great games, and you'd think that we're all in this together. After a while, you get the impression that we're really not. In the end you go, "Yeah, well grow up — this is the way the game business is." But this isn't what's going to make the game business what we want it to be — this is what keeps the game business where it is. And if we think that having a 7-billion-dollar industry is our goal, then it's pretty sad because there's no reason why this industry shouldn't become a 700-billion-dollar industry. Everyone should be playing this stuff, but as long as the software curve is so convoluted, then it's going to be a minimum market.

The game store should be like a music store — thousands of titles — but it's not. You can cut an album for 30 grand, or in your bedroom, but you can't produce a game today, one that will compete, with the systems you have to fight with to get there. But ideally you should, and that's why I think Xbox is a step in the right direction, building upon evolving technology models rather than reinventing models for the sake of trying to maintain a monopoly on the hardware.

NG: How has life changed for you, and what's changed at Oddworld, in the years since Abe's Oddysee?

LL: I've got a lot more gray hairs. I've never been involved with anything as difficult as software development. Being at Oddworld has been probably the most humbling experience of my life. There are a lot of really talented people trying to build something that hasn't been built before. It's just an extremely challenging endeavor. Trying to build high-quality stuff in an industry where, lots of times, people don't really care about quality. But we've been successful, and in many ways very successful. We're on the front line now to take it all to the next level, which has been in many ways our dream.

It's tough when you're under pressure, when you want to spend a little more money on a title because you care about what the industry can be, but then have that put you

■ Behind the Odd ball — with the Xbox launch just around the corner, Lanning rarely has time to knock around the company pool table

■ Oddworld's latest creation, the Unbidd Munch, is not out for revenge

in a dangerous place. The interesting thing about Oddworld is that there are a lot of people that the company's making better. Maybe it's those of us who are running it, or maybe it's the nature of the work we're trying to produce, but it really tends to bring forth the personal issues that we have and confront them. There's something about this company that makes the baggage in your life come to the surface, and you either have to deal with it, or you're not going to make it.

At times there's been turnover. People who don't want to build high-quality work, who believe you just go with it no matter what the quality of it is, people who don't believe in an organic process. And that's the only way you build great shit — an organic process. It has to change and improve as it's being worked on. If a guy is coding a character who thinks that as long as he did what was on his checklist, it's fine, no matter how it feels, he's not going to make it here. Having someone like Microsoft for a publisher, the excitement they have for supporting creators, and with a new console and the way they're designing it, it's such a tremendous release of pressure on all levels.

NG: Your characters always seem to have been victimized, yet revenge never seems to be part of their motive. Is that something you're conscious of?
LL: Yes. It's more of a "What's a healthy life?" perspective. Maybe that could get boring to a lot of people, but at the same time, it's very empowering to a lot of others. For example, without naming specifics, I get really annoyed when the point is, "Let's go blow everything's head off, for... Freedom!" That's a major problem in this country today. I'm serious. We have more people in American prisons than in any other country in the world. You can get into a thousand different things about why, but in the end it's about what kind of content are we delivering to people, and why do we, as content providers, feel good about it?

In Hollywood, and especially in the game industry, [the theme of] "You've been victimized" gives you the license to go kill and maim and torture because that's going to be your gratification. Personally, I think that's pretty weak. As a content designer and

a writer, it's very easy. It's more difficult to try and achieve something that has a little more thought behind it, that has a little more of a feeling behind it, and yet at the same time can be aggressive in these moments. I think Star Wars is a good example of this. It's caring about the content of your content and not just creating stupid stories and excuses for violence. And in our games, while certainly they have their own representation of violence, the other feelings are what make life so fun.

And I think violence can be fun, but people may never know how difficult it was to create concepts like GameSpeak, how that's enabling us to manage so many more things. It will be a fundamental building stone for us forever, and we'll make it simpler and more powerful along the way, but what it really does is give us entertainment value and a sense of life that just hasn't been in these experiences before. And that's critical to evolving the experience beyond "punch them in the head, shoot 'em, find the key."

NG: Moving beyond collision detection to more of a... call it social detection.
LL: We call it social dynamics, social mechanics — "I talked to these guys, and their responses felt right, which made them feel more alive and conscious." It's a very

■ Most of the time in an Oddworld game, you have to think your way out of a tight situation, not shoot your way out

simple concept, but it's really hard to code or conceptualize as a base mechanic.

NG: Of course you want people to actually care about the characters. That's what gets the player motivated to save them.
LL: Or it makes you feel more... curious for putting the screws to them? In the grand scheme of things, I think that's really what interactivity is about. It's about the extremes of dynamics, to try to get the balance of extremes, and not just extremes of violence.

I didn't use the old Nintendo school of, "No violence. We want our kiddie reputation preserved." That doesn't work. That's not real either. And we don't want to make games that are highbrow in terms of "you can't shoot that guy because you shouldn't." Let them shoot him. If you want to be a dick, be a dick. But you're the guardian angel over these characters. That's kind of an idea where, when people read it, the game player typically goes, "I don't give a shit about that." But then when they kill a character they've grown to care about, they go, "I played the entire game because of that." That's one of the things about introducing new concepts and mechanics into what traditionally works. People don't necessarily get it until they see it, until they feel it. We have lots of people email us and say, "I have two sons. One's ill

■ Lanning's personal art and image library spans more than a thousand volumes on dozens of different subjects — he started his collection in high school

Interesting story, like a cast of anti-heroes.

LL: Pulp Fiction was kind of like a high and a low point for that. That was an unbelievable movie, yet at the same time it was really scary that we were laughing at innocent people getting their heads blown off. When I was 18 I would have thought that was the coolest thing, but with age, I'm not sure I want to live in a world where everyone thinks that's the coolest thing. And at the same time I look at history, and I think well, we used to feed people to the lions — have things not really changed?

But I do think that we [as videogame developers] will find more science supporting that we should be responsible with our content. However, it's ludicrous to isolate the videogame industry for violent content in the face of the evening news, or the average TV content, or the average movie content. It's really a sign of the insanity in our society that we're trying to find scapegoats like the game industry in the face of the popular media's addiction to violence and sex and violent sex.

So how do we try to make something that has more value in the scheme of life? I don't want to sell twinkies to kids — I've been there and I've done that. It's a really hard world to create meaningful content, so I'm not going to dog anyone for not doing it. It's a tough read and you've got to put up with a lot of shit if you want to try and pull it off. But ideally, it would be great if that's where we were all headed, and we all tried to do content we care about — I don't care what your issue is, but just build something that you care about. That would be an interesting place to live.

NextGen

and one's. Every time the 11-year-old starts killing the Glokkens, the 6-year-old gets upset and unplugs the system."

Why do they care about it that way? Because it's hitting a different dynamic that gives you a different level of depth, one that people appreciate. And one thing that's true is that people like feeling smart, and they like having depth. If you can give them an experience that's easy to get through, that isn't highbrow, and yet they find that they feel better because of it — and this is what Hollywood constantly struggles with because the writers know this well, but the studio executives don't. People like quality, but they will buy crap. You can fall into the crap curve.

NG: Despite that darker design, do you think your games are still family-friendly:

LL: Traditionally, our games have been too difficult for the little kids. Little kids have sort of used it as a toy — they'll GameSpeak to fart, and watch their character laugh, and that'll crack them up for three hours. Other times, it's been really frustrating to see young people not being able to deal with the controls. One of our primary objectives in this game was to make sure we got past that control barrier for young people, and we've done that. My feeling is that, to have a really successful chemistry, it can work both ways. I'd call it PG-13. There's no reason why we can't be PG-13 and have it darker to the intellectual, trendsetting crowd, and still

appealing to the family. Star Wars does it.

I mean, if you're trying to communicate about the rave/techno movement, for example, then you'd better use the language of that community, but if you're creating a fantasy reality, it's darker to throw a guy into a recycling bin that is to say "fuck." But "fuck" will automatically get you the mature rating. Why do you want to do that? It's stupid.

NG: Even so, it could still be a really

■ Would you let your little kids play an Oddworld game? Lanning hopes to make things simple enough that they easily could

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"...High Heat."

Only High Heat™ Major League Baseball® asks the tough questions — and gets the answers right. That's what makes it so amazingly real.

Q. Why did Mark McGwire slug only .257 with two strikes, but 1.310 when ahead in the count?
A. He can guess the pitch more easily when he's ahead...and crush the ball for a mammoth homer. High Heat's Got it.

Q. How is Barry Bonds sometimes able to wallop splash-landing homers out of Pac Bell Park?
A. He works the count, then looks for a fastball inside and starts his stride away to pull it into the bay. High Heat's Got it.

Names create many (these from the PlayStation2 console and PC realities of the game.

Q. Why should a pitcher make some pickoff throws, but not too many?
A. A few pickoffs shorten runners' leads, but too many can distract the pitcher or result in an error. High Heat's Got it.

Q. When Vladimir Guerrero drills the ball down the left field line, will it curve fair or foul?
A. The spin of the ball coming off the bat causes it to curve towards foul territory. High Heat's Got it.

Q. When would Kevin Brown waste a pitch and throw a breaking ball in the dirt?
A. On an 0-2 count when the hitter is likely to chase a bad pitch while trying to protect the plate. High Heat's Got it.

Q. What makes Aaron Sele's curve so effective against both righties and lefties?
A. His dead overhead, or " 12 to 6" arm motion, makes his curve break nearly straight down against all hitters. High Heat's Got It.

Q. What change in strategy helped fuel Frank Thomas' resurgence to MVP form last year?
A. He adjusted to the umpires calling strikes on the inside corner and began looking for inside pitches to pull. High Heat's Got It.

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Q. On a long throw to the plate, what's the best way to stop a runner from taking an extra base?
A. Use the first baseman to cut off the throw and nail the runner. High Heat's Got It.

Q. How can you tell Bernie Williams is batting in Shea Stadium?
A. You hear boos from Mets fans combined with cheers from the cross-town Yankees fans. High Heat's Got It.

Q. How real is High Heat Major League Baseball?
A. Last year, we found out All-Star Vladimir Guerrero was actually using it as a training tool to scout opposing MLB™ pitchers. This year, we put him on the box.

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Field of Indrema

If they build this console,
will developers come?

Remember the old-school days of Atari 800 and Commodore 64? With a little time and programming know-how, you could create your very own videogame. Never mind that it was made up of a few colored sprites, took about 30 seconds to "finish," and probably played a piece of the Star Wars theme song when you won — it was something you created. But in today's multibillion-dollar game industry, games have become incredibly difficult to program. Nintendo, Sega, Sony and Microsoft have barred an entire generation of budding game makers with expensive dev kits. But there's still hope: A little company called Indrema has plans to foster a wave of programmers with a new, open-source videogame console.

Indrema, a 50-employee company out of Alameda, Calif, is launching its Linux-based videogame console (code-named "L600") this summer. This 600MHz game console will also play DVDs, record television shows onto a hard drive to TiVo, and download and play MP3s — all for an estimated $299. (And that doesn't even get into the potential to play every coin-op from the '70s and '80s on your TV, but more on that later)

"Indrema represents a break from the traditional console business model," boasts CEO John Gildred of

"We have a faster processor than PlayStation 2 and a built-in hard drive; we're launching before Xbox; our GPU is expandable; and we include a personal TV system in our box."

— Eric Rutter, director of operations, Indrema

his company's plans. "Not only are we deregulating game content, but our box is upgradable, allowing us to be the equivalent of Xbox II, III, and IV within a three-year time period without consumers' having to spend $300 on each box. No one has done this, and we feel we should be the guinea pigs because we're the ones who are aggressive enough to shatter all the paradigms."

The L600 is scheduled to launch with 30 games, but only four were confirmed at press time: Sunspire Studios' Tux Racer, Three Axes' adventure title Nunosour, Hyperion Entertainment's FPS Shogo, and Slingshot's Soul Ride 2, a snowboarding simulation. Although the remaining 26 games mysteriously won't be announced until a month before the console ships, Gilred expects 50 games to be available by the end of 2001.

The Hardware

The first thing you notice about the L600 is just how cool it looks. Quite simply, this is what Xbox should have looked like. The seamless chrome casing contains a blue power light, four USB ports, and a slot-load disk opening in front. The back of the system will have stereo inputs and outputs as well as a digital optical audio output.

Under the hood, the L600 sports a

600MHz processor, 96MB of total memory, an Nvidia NV20 graphics chip, and a GPU slide bay, which will allow consumers to upgrade the graphics processor for about $100. Indrema is currently talking with 3D-graphics chip makers ATI and 3dfx to give consumers a choice of upgradable GPUs. A third-party USB dial-up modem with broadband Ethernet will be available at launch. "We have a faster processor than PlayStation 2 and a built-in hard drive," says Indrema Director of Operations Eric Rutter about his system's advantages over other consoles. "We launch before Xbox, our GPU is expandable, and we include a personal TV system in our box."

The system will ship with one standard controller, which will be manufactured for Indrema under contract by an undisclosed peripheral maker. The standard controller will be similar to Sony's Dual Shock 2 and will include four action buttons on the right side, two shoulder triggers on each side, a digital direction pad on the left, dual

analog joysticks in front, and rumble feedback. The connector will be standard USB. Gilred expects to release an advanced controller after launch that will incorporate voice recognition and have six action buttons.

Guerrilla Warfare

Like most inventions, Indrema originated from one person who identified a market need. "I was playing a 'Capture the Flag' game of Quake one day and realized there's virtually no way to create something new for a console videogame system and get it out in the marketplace today," reminisces Gilred. "Filters [such as lengthy approval processes] in the console publishing world don't allow the same freedoms of expression to the console videogame developer that PC developers rely on for innovation."

According to Gilred, this restricted creativity is responsible for the limited size of the current videogame market, which is filled with sequels and games that are based on or influenced by other games. So with his philosophy of

console programming freedom, Gilred decided to create the ultimate game box to harness the creative PC mentality into a console format. "We don't feel that Xbox will open any new doors for developers," says Gilred. "You can't get any games on Xbox without going through all the Microsoft filters."

Under the Indrema business model, the console filters that Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo regularly use to license and approve games are virtually gone. "As long as you know how to code, you can be a user one day and a developer the next," he claims.

With second-generation PlayStation 2 games along with Xbox and GameCube also making their debuts this year, Gilred realizes he has his work cut out for him. Even Sega has changed its strategy to remain competitive in the face of these next-generation giants. Yet Gilred sees the coming console competition as a marathon, not a sprint. "We're not going head-to-head against Sony or Microsoft," he explains. "You don't need [Microsoft's marketing

■ Slingshot's Soul Ride 2 is a port of the PC game that shipped back in 2000. The snowboarding simulation uses satellite topography data to recreate real-life locales like California's Mammoth Mountain and Tuckerman Ravine in New Hampshire.

budget of $500 million to launch a next-generation platform. 3DO threw a lot of money at their system, and look what it got them. We'll use a grassroots campaign. We want to get independent developers interested in Indrema and let them run with the technology. We're in it for the long haul."

The Roots of the Grass

Indrema's grassroots approach seems to acknowledge that today's gaming gods won't fall over themselves to develop for the console, but it still opens the door for independent videogame developers as well as anyone interested in dabbling in game development. Gildred hopes to cultivate a crop of future game developers through Indrema. With the hassles of costs and huge publishers out of the way, nothing stands between a programmer's vision and the actual game (as long as you understand Linux). The open-source system allows anyone to download the necessary code from the Web (http://ldn.indrema.com) and begin developing videogames out of the box using OpenGL and OpenAL.

Gildred thinks giving the ownership of the platform to developers will lower development costs, increase the quality of games, and speed up the time it takes to bring a game to the marketplace. But with this freedom will come challenges: illegal emulators like MAME (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) ROMs, pornographic games, and a bunch of half-baked, half-finished

Three Axis plans to distribute its *Nanosaur* port for free to exhibit its name in the game industry. The Indrema version should perfectly mirror the original Mac version, shown here. *Nanosaur* is a 3D action game originally developed by Pangea Software in 1998 where players roam a prehistoric Earth in search of eggs while battling their protective dinosaur parents.

programmers looking to make their dream game. Think of how many hardcore gamers are out there who have designed their own Unreal mods, created character skins, and developed custom game levels. Why are these PC-only projects? Because developing a game for PS2 or Xbox is so complex that you can't do it without expensive hardware and software, Indrema game makers only need to download a free 150MB application to their PCs. If you don't think innovation can come from hobbyist game makers, remember that the highly acclaimed *Half-Life Counterstrike* started as "just a mod."

It's this hybrid of a hardcore hacker and gamer that Gildred hopes to entice. "We're not going after the same market as other next-generation systems," he says. "Our target audience is the core gamer, which makes up 24% of the gaming market. These early adopters are after the hottest games. We want to build credibility with gamers."

The Games?

Unfortunately today's "hottest games" (like *Metal Gear Solid 2* or *Shenmue*) require massive development teams, huge budgets, and commitments from leading third-party publishers. Indrema was reluctant to share much information

on the games themselves, and the only title **Next Gen** saw during our demo was *Tux Racer*, a penguin racing game — and to be brutally honest, this game couldn't hold MGS2's warranty card. If *Tux Racer* is the system's killer app, Indrema is going to have a difficult time building credibility with hardcore gamers. Although the Indrema team seems to have a firm grasp of who is going to want to program games for their system, they do seem a bit out of touch with what kind of titles a hardcore game audience will want.

Aside from *Tux Racer*, another title scheduled for launch will be *Soul Ride 2*, a port of a PC snowboard simulation that was published last year by On Deck Interactive, The Gathering's budget label. For developer Slingshot, porting the game to Indrema was a low-risk, high-gain gamble. The company sees Indrema as a platform that uses a familiar CPU and API, and its Nvidia chipset is a developer favorite. Also, Slingshot can take existing Windows-based code for an Indrema version, whereas it would have to start from scratch on a proprietary console like PS2. "It's a cautious investment for us," explains Slingshot VP of Software Thatcher Ulrich. "We're not gearing up for a *Final Fantasy*-type product here, and I can

port the game to Linux in my spare time without a big investment."

This "not much to lose" approach is echoed by Three Axis President Kyle Albert, who's developing a port of Pangea's freeware Mac title, Nanosaur. "The Linux gaming market on PCs is not growing very rapidly," says Albert. "The real growth will come from companies like Indrema, which can bring Linux to

> **Indrema Director of Software Architecture Randal Walser is responsible for the console's 3D interface.**

titles that may ultimately dilute the Indrema game library are sure to follow.

Yet Indrema will draw its strength from the very same source of these potential problems: an army comprised of mod-designing kids and corporate

> ### "As long as you know how to code, you can be a user one day and a developer the next."
> — John Gildred, CEO, Indrema
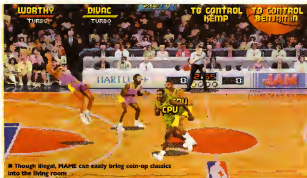
Building the Box

→ Recent console design preferences have been all over the map: PlayStation 2 and Xbox opted for boxes with a dark, ribbed, stereo-component-like feel, while Nintendo's GameCube occupies the opposite side of the spectrum with a toy-like design available in different colors. Surprisingly, Indrema's industrial design subscribes to neither of these philosophies.

The final form of the system (see **photo B**) was created after only a few months of brainstorming between Nextform Product Design Engineer Darren Kim and Indrema CEO John Gildred. While the initial efforts were obviously focused on making the system more in the style of a console (see **sketch 1**) — Kim likened the "box with handle" to a digital toolbox — a stereo-component version was also considered (see **sketch 4**).

"In the beginning of our design process, I had been focused on the console aspect," explains Kim. "However, as the design progressed, I realized that the way into the living room is not game-centric, and not even set-top-box-centric, but rather home-entertainment-centric.

After considering both the traditional console and stereo-component versions, Kim and Gildred chose something completely different. Instead of trying to mimic the black, boxy look of many A/V components, they took their inspiration from untraditional sources. "Our intention was to create a design that has an otherworldly feel," says Kim. "We gravitated to the look of the alien spaceship in *War of the Worlds*. With a few simple anamorphic curves, a metallic finish, and lighting details, we created the effect of an alien spacecraft." While the final design doesn't look exactly like a UFO (although as you can see by **sketch 3**, such a concept was considered), these design decisions really make Indrema stand out from its boxy competitors. The chrome finish, blue LED, and gill-like vents on the sides of the machine make for a high-end aesthetic that realizes Indrema's eventual goal — to see it as "the crown jewel of an entertainment center" — Blake Fischer

> **"We gravitated to the look of the alien spaceship in *War of the Worlds*."**
> — Darren Kim, product design engineer, Nextform

Though illegal, MAME can easily bring coin-op classics into the living room

With [developer] freedom come challenges: illegal emulators like MAME ROMs, pornographic games, and too many half-baked, half-finished titles that may ultimately dilute the Indrema game library...

With MAME, players can try out hard-to-find arcade games like this Pac-Man hack, Hangly Man

the consumer with a good interface so they don't even know they're using a product running on Linux?"

So when can we expect the rest of the industry to jump on board? We're not holding our breath. Any game that hits retail requires a large financial investment, and not many established publishers are willing to bank on a rookie. Given that EA refused to develop for Dreamcast because EA's executives believed that every hour and every dollar spent on Dreamcast games would take away from work on PS2, chances are slim many larger companies will dedicate potential PS2 or Xbox resources to Indrema.

"If it's going to succeed, it's going to slowly build up momentum over time, much like the Linux platform itself,"

predicts Namco Director of Marketing Mike Fischer. "Indrema isn't wooing publishers with a huge marketing budget. A major publisher needs to see an established, significant installed base before committing. The typical hardware platform shows its likelihood of success in the first few months of launch, but I think in Indrema's case [the signs of success] will come slower, and I think they're prepared for that. Their lack of up-front spending [on marketing and manufacturing] will keep publishers away in the short term, but also allow them to stay in the market."

Play Double Dragon on Your TV!

For classic game cultists across the country, Indrema's key selling point may

be a piece of free software that has yet to be created but is sure to be available within weeks of Indrema's launch. MAME is a program that emulates coin-op games on a PC. There are over 1,500 arcade games, from Aero Fighters to Zoo Keeper, hiding as data files on hard drives and Web sites around the world. Versions of MAME are already available for all flavors of Windows, Mac, BeOS, UNIX, Amiga, and others, and an Indrema version is sure to follow.

While gamers have been getting their kicks playing classic arcade games on their PCs (albeit illegally for the most part), the opportunity to play an arcade-perfect Samurai Shodown II on a TV is tempting. Even Gildred admits that he wouldn't be surprised if a flood of emulators is responsible for some of the

first "contributions" to his platform. But he says that any degree of content approval from Indrema would infringe on the freedom that is at the core of his open-system business model. (It should be noted that although MAME is legal, acquiring the game data file ROMs is not, and Next Gen does not condone the practice of such activities.)

Untraditional Business Model

Indrema's three revenue streams will come through game certification, hardware licensing, and content distribution — the online sale and rental of music, video, and games. To achieve certification, a game must be technically sound and pass a standard of gameplay quality. Unlike the traditional certification
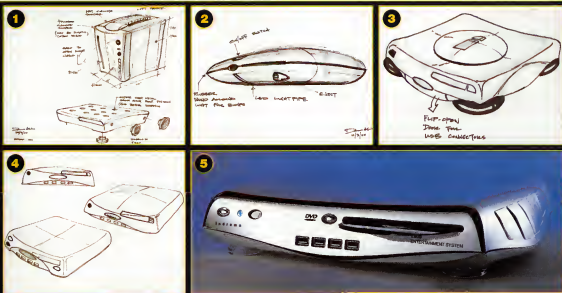
processes of Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft, Indrema won't consider the sales potential or nature of the content, however controversial it may be. The ESRB will rate all certified Indrema games, but developers can still create and post unrated and uncertified games, though Indrema won't guarantee these will run properly.

The three-year goal of the company

is to get the system into the homes of 10% of the gaming market. To do this, Indrema's business model will allow third-party hardware manufacturers to make future products that will be cobranded. Gildred expects to see Indrema's chipset built into other digital home entertainment systems in the near future, similar to what's happening with Dreamcast.

Online content distribution may be the primary source of income for Indrema, because **Next Gen** doubts whether certification will deliver much revenue. It's unrealistic to expect Indrema's target audience — the underground, hobbyist gamer — to pay a fee for an "official" stamp of approval. They simply won't care. The unconventional developers will want to just put their games out there, much like the hundreds of mods currently available for free download off the Internet.

All-In-One Box

Beyond its developer-friendly architecture, Indrema has created its own DVR called the Personal TV System, which

will allow you to record and stop live TV (similar to DVR leaders TiVo and ReplayTV). Consumers will also be able to search Internet Video Channels (IVC) to download movies, syndicated TV shows, or games onto the system's 10GB hard drive. And what's more, the L400 will allow consumers to download MP3s onto the hard drive or directly to a portable MP3 player.

"We don't think DVD movie playback, which the PlayStation 2 has out of the box and Xbox will have if you buy the extra remote control, is a breakout technology," continues Gildred. "Indrema will allow you to record a TV show on its DVR while playing a videogame at the same time. The competition can't compete with this on top of our other capabilities."

Gildred hopes to improve the experience of watching TV through Indrema. Changing the channel will be done through 3D cubes, as one TV program will play on one side of a box and rotate to the next program in real time. Viewers can customize special interface effects, such as a motion blur during rewinding or fast forwarding.

Unlike the current DVRs, which sell for $299 and up (plus a $299 subscription fee for TiVo), Indrema's built-in DVR will ship with enough memory to

Hyperion Entertainment is bringing 1998's FPS Shogo: Mobile Armor Division to Indrema. A port of Monolith's critically acclaimed PC title, Shogo will instantly fit the need for a run-n'-gun shooter, but will it translate well to a console game? It's unknown whether a keyboard/mouse control scheme will be available

record 10 hours of programming. Gildred expects an additional hard drive with as much as 60 hours of recording capabilities to be released in the future. The planned ability to access online content, as well as television content, is a step beyond what is currently offered by the competition, though Ultimate TV and ReplayTV do have Internet connections.

Indrema's Music Manager will be able to rip songs from CDs, download MP3s from the Internet and store them all locally on the hard drive (and don't be surprised to see an independently developed version of Napster find its way onto the platform). "We're the first console videogame system to deliver on the promise of breakout features like Personal TV and MP3 jukebox," said Gildred. Despite these extra features planned for the box, Gildred insists the gaming component is central. "We're not marketing Indrema as a DVD system. This is a gaming system first."

Will It Work?
There's no doubt that Indrema's all-in-

one box offers quite a package with its DVR, MP3 jukebox, broadband network, DVD movie playback, and videogame core. Whether the company can successfully offer all of these services remains to be seen, and we wonder if Indrema's DVR will offer the same impressive functionality found in TiVo.

More importantly, though, is this question: Will the system attract enough developer interest to result in some quality games? That too remains to be seen. The significance of a game console with no creative barriers to entry shouldn't be underestimated, and Indrema's success literally rests with developers. Nevertheless, its questionable titles and limited industry support make Indrema's launch an uphill battle.

Gildred claims the videogame market is only a third of what it could be, but is Indrema the system to capture these untapped consumers? Can the machine become the hip, hacker art-house alternative to the mainstream offerings from Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft? We certainly hope so, but the road won't be easy. — John Goodlsi/Kevin Toyama

▶ Can Indrema be all these things, and do them just as well? Clockwise from top: A game console, an MP3 player, a DVD player, and a Digital TV recorder

HOW INDREMA MEASURES UP TO THE COMPETITION

	Indrema	Xbox	PS2	GameCube	Dreamcast
CPU	600MHz x86	733MHz Intel	300MHz	405MHz Power PC	200MHz Hitachi SH-4
GPU	next-generation Nvidia	250MHz Nvidia	150MHz Sony GS	200MHz "Flipper"	NEC PowerVR DC
Total Memory	96MB (64 core + 32 local)	64MB	38MB	43MB	26MB
Polygon Rate (theoretical)	120 million/sec	150 million/sec	66 million/sec	6 to 12 million/sec	3 million/sec
Storage (internal hard disk)	10GB hard disk	8GB hard disk	none	none	none

▶ Sunspire Studios brought its Tux Racer to Windows, Linux, and Mac, and the company will soon unveil an Indrema port as well

→ **Finals**

It's a month of high-profile, eagerly
anticipated, or just plain terrific games
— sometimes, it pays to get out of bed

72

→ **PlayStation2**

Star Wars Starfighter	70
Onimusha	72
Oni	74

■ Arguably the single coolest thing about the game is the sheer number of different craft that can be flying around at once

■ You're offered a choice of in-cockpit or third-person points of view

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Star Wars Starfighter

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: LucasArts

A good *Episode I* game? Believe it or not, yes

Considering the track record of
Star Wars games over the last
couple of years — they've swung from
the barely playable Jedi Power Battles
to the completely execrable *Star
Wars: Demolition* — we were, to
pardon the pun, losing hope. Would

the franchise ever again reach the
lofty heights it achieved back in the
heyday of *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*?

As it turns out, with *Starfighter*, it
almost does. And, perhaps
predictably, it does so by hewing close
to the *X-Wing*/*TIE Fighter* mold.

Starfighter is set during the Trade
Federation blockade of Naboo
depicted in *Episode I*. In the course of
the game, you take the roles of three
different characters battling against
the Federation, and their storylines
overlap and quickly converge. There's

Rhys, a rookie pilot in Naboo's home
forces; Vana, a Naboo native who's
been wandering the galaxy for many
years; and Nym, a typical "mercenary
with a heart of gold." Each character's
ship handles differently and comes
outfitted with different special
weapons. But this presents less of a
strategic challenge than a technical
one, since (in the single-player Story
mode, anyway) you have no choice in
the matter, and the storyline assigns
you a character and ship at the start
of each mission.

First of all, the game looks simply
gorgeous. The power of PlayStation 2
has been reasonably well harnessed
here. Starships shine and stars glitter

80

The Finals Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at Next Generation will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

★★★★★ **REVOLUTIONARY**
★★★★☆ **EXCELLENT**
★★★☆☆ **GOOD**
★★☆☆☆ **FAIR**
★☆☆☆☆ **BAD**
● Denotes a review of a Japanese product

MY SWEET NABOO

One thing you'll notice about Starfighter is that the storyline is completely original. It actually parallels, rather than intersects with, the storyline of Episode I. You don't bump into Anakin Skywalker or Queen Amidala, and there's not a Gungan in sight (reason alone to celebrate). But the game does conclude — and with only 14 levels, it's not as if we're giving much away here — with a similar assault on a Trade Federation battleship. Interestingly, you actually get to blow the thing up deliberately, rather than by accident.

while ground missions soar over sprawling vistas and dozens upon dozens of ships and other craft fill the screen. The explosions have a suspicious 2D flatness about them, and there's a tiny amount of slowdown here and there, but neither detracts from the overall presentation or the magnificent visual impact.

The missions are varied (if not exactly numerous), ranging from escort to search-and-destroy. In keeping with the X-Wing/TIE Fighter model of gameplay, each mission is as much a puzzle as an action challenge. It takes a certain amount of trial and error, especially at higher difficulty levels, to determine the best or most efficient way to accomplish the tasks at hand. For example, do you take out the nearby AAT tanks, or break away and cut off that wave of incoming bombers first? Choose wrong, and it's

likely some mission-critical hardware will be destroyed before you can turn your attention back the other way.

The controls are fairly simple and easy to grasp, while the flight model is smooth and relatively fluid. But it's worth noting that the space-based missions are far more exciting on the whole than those that take place on the planet's surface. In space, most of your time is spent chasing other quick-moving craft, whereas planetary combat often requires slowing your ship down to a crawl to blast away at stationary (or just lumbering) ground targets. Still, since the battlefields are almost always in constant flux, with new enemies appearing continually, it's not as if you're likely to get bored.

You'll notice that every stage also has a number of bonus goals, and by accomplishing these you earn medals that can unlock bonus missions. This is

> **Starships shine and stars glitter, while ground missions soar over sprawling vistas and dozens upon dozens of ships and other craft fill the screen.**

■ The combat is generally as fast-paced and slick as you could possibly ask for — if only the whole thing lasted a little longer

■ Not all the combat is in space — you get a few ground-pounding missions as well

good, because the single-player game only lasts for exactly 14 stages — even at the medium difficulty setting, you could beat this in a day or two of dedicated play with little problem. This is easily Starfighter's most egregious shortcoming. It doesn't last very long, and trying to earn medals to extend the play time generally means playing through the same missions over and over in an effort to beat them flawlessly. Obviously, this is a process of diminishing returns.

While it lasts, though, Starfighter is a rare treat. Its combination of slick graphics, tenacious mission designs, and responsive control is sure to please just about anyone. After all, there's something about flying through space, blasting at enemies and capital ships while that Star Wars music plays in the background that instantly taps into the part of your brain that's still a hyper-excited, wide-eyed kid who dreams of adventure.
— Jeff Lundrigon

■ There's a metric ton of recognizable Episode I hardware on display

■ There are also many new original craft and weapons to deal with

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: The best Star Wars game in at least a couple of years.

■ The enemies are vaguely human, but always deadly

THE CIRCLE IS NOW COMPLETE

In Japanese the word "oni" means ogre or demon, while "musha" means warrior. Not surprisingly, both words have been used in game titles before. Oni is the most recent (see review, page 70), while M.U.S.H.A. was an exemplary top-down, vertically scrolling shooter from the 16-bit era. Which of these three games is best? It depends on whom you ask, but we'd have to say that M.U.S.H.A. still holds up really well.

M.U.S.H.A.: cool in 1990, still cool today

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Onimusha

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom

Wait a minute. These aren't zombies — they're *demons!*

■ The constantly spawning enemies can get a little repetitious

► Make no mistake: Onimusha is Resident Evil with swordfighting. While the game is set in Japan's medieval past, a setting samurai and demons, and while it was developed by an entirely different team, its heritage isn't too hard to spot. Just like the RE series, Onimusha is an action adventure that features pre-rendered backgrounds and 3D characters. Just as in RE, you must fight off strange and misshapen enemies who are hell-bent

on your death. There's even a puzzle in which you find a gear and then put it in a machine to make the other gears turn — just like in Resident Evil.

Unfortunately, while we can't fault anybody for following in the footsteps of Capcom's monster series, Onimusha is clearly patterned after the very first Resident Evil, both in gameplay and approach. As a result, it doesn't benefit from anything that's been improved in the last several

years of sequels in this genre.

Particularly lacking is the ability to tell a compelling story. As Samonosuke, the samurai hero, you must rescue a princess in a castle infested by demons, and that's about it. Obviously, this plot is far from complex or intriguing, and all of the spectacular war footage in the opening movie is mere window dressing. There are no twists or surprises, and there's very little reason to care about the characters. Whole subplots are dropped, and it lacks the pacing or involvement of any of the later Resident Evil games. In fact, this oddly recaptures the almost random feel of the first game and even features some of its own examples of the kind of absurd dialogue that made the first Resident Evil so infamous.

Where Onimusha differentiates itself from its biologically engineered

■ These giant swordsmen can choke the life out of you if you aren't careful — their huge swords can make short work of you too

brethren is in its combat. As the game takes place in medieval Japan, you can select from a variety of bladed weapons to carve your way through the demonic hordes. The combat is actually quite fun, but not necessarily involving — there aren't very many moves at your disposal. Samonouske's overall well-being depends on your ability to fight, since he can capture the souls of vanquished enemies to power up his swords and regain life. Fortunately, the combat engine has been tuned to high-perfection, as fights erupt almost every step of the way through the game. The combat can, however, get unnecessarily frustrating and difficult at times thanks to the way the camera shifts against preset backgrounds.

The production values in Onimusho are extraordinarily high. While the technology may not be up

to par — the pre-rendered backgrounds look a little old-school — the art and production design are still top-notch. The characters are extremely lifelike (except when they try to hold conversations), and the few pre-rendered cinemas in the game are absolutely breathtaking. The orchestral scoring is also excellent and sets a properly sweeping mood for the gameplay.

A handful of moments in the game manage to capture a truly epic, cinematic feel, as if you're part of a playable movie — one fight on a rooftop at night is particularly convincing. But unfortunately these moments are few and far between, and the whole experience is over rather quickly. Even though Onimusho contains plenty of secrets to unlock, most gamers will have had their fill in a single good weekend.   — Blake Fischer

□ NextGen ★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

Bottom Line: *Onimusha* is a beautiful game that lacks the refinement of more modern game designs. It's a pretty good ride, but one that you'll forget as new PS2 games appear.

■ The graphic detail in Onimusha is outstanding, but the pre-rendered backgrounds feel very static compared to other recent adventure games like Code: Veronica

■ The enemies are often tenacious and brutal — this is no easy ride

■ PLAYSTATION 2
Oni
■ Publisher: **Rockstar** ■ Developer: **Bungie**

More proof that chicks kick ass

■ Konoko is one part Terminator and one part Bruce Lee (except she's a woman)

→ As you may know, Bungie's third-person 3D brawler Oni has been in development for quite a while — certainly its heroine, Konoko, has been plastered hither and yon around the industry for what seems like an eternity. Usually, such a long development does not bode well. However, thankfully that's not the case here — not entirely, anyway.

First, it should be duly noted that the storyline that develops over the course of the game is deep and engaging. Konoko is a technologically enhanced officer of the law who's fighting a typically shadowy criminal syndicate known as, um, The Syndicate. Make no mistake, though, the meat of the game is pure, latter-day Final Fight-style, brawling action

(with a hair of puzzle solving), as Konoko punches, kicks, and shoots her way through 14 impressively lengthy missions.

And it must be said that what grabs your attention right away is the incredibly fluid character animation. Bungie's much vaunted motion interpolation means that characters flow from one move to the next with no stops or "null states" in between, and the results are impressive — all the more so in service of the responsive control. Konoko's athleticism is a joy to behold, and yes, she can cartwheel over an object and pick it up. The anime-influenced production design is slick, with huge, sometimes cavernous spaces. The level design is tenacious and, if anything, overly challenging — a typical symptom of a game with a long development time.

But all is not perfect. The framerate is anything but constant,

■ Every blow results in a color-coded impact splash — which, taken together with the abundant motion trails, mean the game often erupts in pretty outrageous pyrotechnics

A MATTER OF CONTROL

First thing, let's grant that adapting third-person action games to a console controller is inherently problematic, and it may very well be the case that no ideal solution actually exists. We understand that, but being human, we keep hoping. In Oni's case, while the control is nicely responsive, Konoko's wild tumbles, rolls, flips, and impressive arsenal of special attacks also make the scheme necessarily complex, and unfortunately, as is so often the case, none of the available control layouts is 100% intuitive or comfortable. Sometimes an act as simple as turning to face an opponent is a frustrating exercise. We're also not sure why, in this day of analog control, any game would still require a double tap to dash — effectively requiring you to move your thumb from the stick to the D-pad. However, things are so smooth the other 90% of the time (with practice, of course), we'll hand wave it.

and textures are small and rely heavily on filtering, giving everything a slightly blurry look. As large as the levels are, the paucity of textures also makes them look very much the same. There are also several not insignificant control issues (see sidebar).

At the end of the day though, the action and storyline are more than enough to overcome the shortcomings. This is a blast. — Jeff Lundrigan

⇄**NextGen** ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: It may have been a long time coming, but it was worth the wait. In fact, in a number of important ways, this is the game The Bouncer should have been.

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Aqua Aqua
■ Platform: **Playstation 2** ■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **Zed Two**

Puzzle games are great for any console because they rarely rely on fancy graphics and focus on pure playability. Tetris, Bust-A-Move, and Chu-Chu Rocket are examples of games that kept everything simple, from the premise to the control scheme. The good news for PlayStation 2 fans is that Aqua Aqua succeeds with the formula but the bad news is that it fails in the latter.

Remember Wetrix from the early days of N64? This is pretty much the exact same game. On a 3D map, you place falling pieces that raise or fatten hills on a grid. The hills can form interlocking walls that trap falling water, which can then be evaporated with fireballs. If enough water isn't trapped and evaporated, the game is over. The pace is fast, and the gameplay is challenging, especially in Versus mode.

But there are some major problems. The overly sensitive controls make maneuvering the blocks awkward, and not nearly precise enough. The odd angle of the

■ The rainbows are pretty, but hills blocking the view sure aren't

3D board makes it difficult to determine where two blocks need to touch for a perfect fit, often resulting in small, frustrating gaps that leak.

The Versus and Story modes are accessible only after completing the tutorial. This is fine, since the training gives you the information required to enjoy the game, but unless you've saved this to a memory card, you cannot play the other two modes without finishing the tutorial again—all eight stages of it. Frankly, requiring a memory card to access a basic part of a single-puzzle game is just inexcusable.

— Kevin Toyama

■ Next Gen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: You'll like this game if you have a lot of patience and a memory card.

ATV Off-Road Fury
■ Platform: **Playstation 2** ■ Publisher: **Sony** ■ Developer: **Rainbow Studios**

If you don't know, ATVs (all-terrain vehicles) are a kind of four-wheeled dirt bike. Curiously the additional two wheels seem to make them more dangerous, not less — go figure. In any case, on ATV racing game had better capture the speed and thrill these tiny death machines can generate, or it's going to sleek. Which is why we're happy to report that Off-Road Fury accomplishes this rather neatly. This is, perhaps, unsurprising — developer Rainbow Studios also produced the fine Motocross Madness series.

The game offers a couple of dozen tracks, representing a nice range of different terrain, from deserts to snowy mountains, along with an indoor arena circuit. Supercross champion Stephane Roncada contributed to the design, and every track represents a finely tuned challenge, and while the pure adrenaline rush of racing the jumps and sending your vehicle hurtling across hundreds of feet of space at treetop height. The physics model may not be entirely realistic — no ATV ever made could catch this much air and in fact the handling has a distinctly floaty feel — but it sure is a thrill.

This does require a lot of practice in

■ Catching ridiculous air is all in a day's work for the ATV pro — especially the arm-chair version

learning how to jump and land properly so as not to lose any momentum, as a poorly executed landing can stop you cold. Given the vagaries of jostling with other riders, this also sometimes means winning is as much a matter of luck as skill, which may be realistic but can get frustrating. Also, in Career Mode, once you've selected one of the dozen real-world ATVs available (from the likes of Honda, Kawasaki, and Yamaha), you're stuck with it, even when it's poorly suited to the terrain of the next track.

But despite these quibbles, the game sports brilliant graphics, a (mostly) rock-solid framerate, intense tracks, a plethora of options, and excellent control.

— Jeff Lundrigan

■ Next Gen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Buy it. You'll like it.

Kengo: Master of Bushido
■ Publisher: **Crave** ■ Developer: **Lightweight**

Just as sharp as Bushido Blade

Shozaemon   Genpo's Std.

■ A typical match lasts much longer than in the original Bushido Blade, but believe it or not, the fighting is actually faster-paced

Finally, the developers of the Bushido Blade series have produced another title in their samurai combat line. While Kengo follows many of the precedents set by Bushido Blade, it manages to break some new ground as well, giving it a unique look and a fresh feel.

One major change is the restructuring of the single-player game. Almost every fighting game, Bushido Blade included, presents a shallow and uninspired single-player experience; typically, you cycle through a series of opponents to confront some evil boss at the end. Kengo, however, presents you with a huge number of moves that must be actually taught and learned. It also offers numerous weapons, a variety of different fighting and battle types, and a plethora of training exercises designed to increase your character's stats.

Lightweight has further enhanced Bushido's fighting engine. Players are now able to block easily, which speeds up the fighting and enables matches to continue for more than a few seconds; dodging, strafing, and

■ The single-player game is structured around the idea of continually being taught new moves

rolling are also easy to perform, so defensive combat tactics play an important role; and finally, each sword comes with a unique super move. Although Bushido Blade purists may feel that this latter aspect detracts from the realism of the fighting engine, actually

executing and landing a super move takes great skill and practice.

In the end, Kengo is a great fighter that offers plenty of depth, solid controls, and an interesting single-player mode. If you're a PS2 owner jonesing for a fighting game, look no further. — Chester Barber

■ Next Gen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: With a deep fighting engine and great replay value, you'll be playing this one for weeks. If you loved Bushido Blade, Kengo is definitely a must-buy.

LEONARD — ROBINSON

Round 1
1.58

Some fighters look more like their real-life counterparts than others

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Knockout Kings 2001

A great follow-up combo

■ Publisher: EA Sports   ■ Developer: Black Ops Entertainment

Boxing, in its purest form, is so much more than two knuckle-heads with gloves trying to cave in each other's craniums. It's more like a physical game of chess, with punches instead of pawns. Finally, EA Sports has delivered a boxing game that gets it mostly right with *Knockout Kings 2001* for PS2.

Chock full of former and current puglists to fight as or against (such as Ali, Duran, and both Sugar Rays, to name but a few), the game is best enjoyed by creating your own fighter and working your way up through the ranks. Only let's hope that next year's game gives us a lot more choices for customizing our fighter.

Regardless of whom you choose, the majority of your time will be spent trying to figure out how to outwit, outpoint, and outlast your foe. The controls take some getting used to — it's a shame you can't remap the buttons — but once understood, you can access a huge variety of punches, feints, and blocks. Button-bashers will find themselves losing early and often. Learning when and what punch to throw, depending

You've got to hand it to EA Sports: Every new Knockout Kings game is better than the last one

on the skills of your fighter, is the key to success, and you'll have a great time mastering the subtleties of this awesome sport.

It's definitely not the greatest-looking game; it's no slouch, certainly, but there are plenty of jaggies and badly meshing polygons, especially during the poorly-done auto replays. But you'll soon forgive all this as you lose yourself in the mesmerizing cut-and-mouse gameplay. True boxing fans, rejoice — your prayers have finally been answered.   — Rob Smolka

⏩ **NextGen** ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Honoring the strategy of boxing as much as the ferocity, this should enthrall fans of the sport.

NBA Live 2001

■ Platform: **Playstation 2**   ■ Publisher: **EA Sports**   ■ Developer: **EA Sports**

In some ways, *NBA Live 2001* on Playstation 2 is a bit of a disappointment. On sure, it looks fantastic, and the solid, fast, and fun gameplay will be instantly familiar to anyone who's ever sampled this series' hoops action in the past, but it's like being fed soup and a salad when you were really hungry for a big, juicy steak.

For some odd reason, certain features that were part of the original PlayStation version, such as the career league and team dispersal draft, have gone missing. Other than a few new inside post maneuvers and a bunch full of polygonal teammates, little progress has been made in a series that heretofore was praised for its yearly innovations and improvements. It's

doubly puzzling, too, considering how late into the NBA season the game is being released; normally, we see each new incarnation right around the opening day of the schedule.

What is here, though, is more than enough to satisfy hoops fans looking for some intense on-court action. Silky-smooth controls, beautifully spirited motion-capture moves, a host of legendary players, and All the things a decently convincing brand of basketball on both sides of the court make this an action game worth owning. Just

It's too bad, but this year's NBA Live just ain't as good as last year's

don't expect to be able to pour on the A1 sauce.   — Rob Smolko

⏩ **NextGen** ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: It's good-looking and plays well, but it isn't quite the leap it should (and arguably could) have been.

NCAA Final Four 2001

■ Platform: **Playstation 2**   ■ Publisher: **989 Studios**   ■ Developer: **Killer Game**

After the hatchet job that 989 Sports pulled on its evergreen GameDay franchise on PlayStation 2, we were dreading one of its latest basketball games, since the company hasn't exactly excelled at the sport in the past. Predictably, NCAA Final Four 2001 comes on the ho-hum tradition of its predecessors, with its herky-jerky graphics, dubious AI, and utter lack of play balance. We will say one thing, though: The does at least appear to be final code, for better or worse.

Graphically, NCAA 2001 is no better than average. The player models could have used a few more polygons, which were obviously stolen to "enhance" the game by adding a few fully 3D cheer-leaders, and the dunk animations ruin their course far too quickly to offer any sense of power or dazzle. On a positive

note, the physics of the ball seem pretty accurate, producing believable rebounds and bounce passes.

The AI is a particular sore spot, especially when it comes to your own teammates. They seem to have little interest in helping your cause, especially if a defender gets past you at the top of the key if this happens, it's smooth sailing, right to the rim with no sign of life from the big men in the paint.

Every area of the game is loaded with enough deficiencies that prevent us from recommending it. It's not going to wow you visually, the players are dumb enough to have you flinging your

Further proof that 989 Sports has lost it big time on PS2: NCAA Final Four 2001

gamepad every few trips down the court, and the computer-controlled team shoots like a bunch of madmen, regardless of the difficulty level. Even the enormous selection of teams (over 300) is undercut by the lack of a dynasty mode of any kind.   — Rob Smolko

⏩ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Oh well, there's always next year (or the year after that, or the year after that...).

WDL: Thunder Tanks

■ Platform: **Playstation 2**   ■ Publisher: **3DO**   ■ Developer: **3DO**

WDL:TT is simple to define. It's Combat for Atari 2600, only with WWF-style announcers and opponents, and multiple styles of games. Although each event can be practiced individually, a tournament cycles through Deathmatch, CTF (Frenzy to CTF variant with randomly spawning flags), and Domination (a battle for control of drone-tank spawning points).

Unfortunately, the gameplay is crushed beneath a total lack of fine tuning. There's a nice selection of tanks, but their very variety skews the play balance. The lightning-fast Berserker rules Domination events but is too fragile in Deathmatch. Conversely, the nigh-indestructible Titan is one of few tanks capable of easily taking down the final boss, but if you have to face a couple of speedy opponents in a

Domination match, forget it.

Graphics are uneven, mixing great effects — Banshee's sonic wave and the incredibly frequent explosions, for example — with surprisingly basic tank models. And arenas are all small, enclosed, plain-textured coliseums inadequately populated with mostly destructible features.

At too, is suspect. During one memorable frenzy match, we watched one CPU opponent repeatedly grab the flag and drive directly into a river of molten metal. Finally longevity is crippled because every tournament features the same events in the same

The small, bland arenas range from Fort Knox to Kyoto, and not a one is visually memorable

arenas in the same order.

The game also offers several forms of split-screen multiplay, which, although significantly more satisfying, aren't an adequate enough reason to purchase the game. WDL:TT isn't horrible, but we'll wait for Twisted Metal Black.   — Eric Bratcher

⏩ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: WDL:TT fails to innovate. It misses the brass ring simply because it doesn't bother reaching for it.

HP 118 / 118
TP 376 / 376
0
Lv 18 Keiko

Lv 7 GameWEEK-X

Lv 23 chitoh

Lv 4 Huna Donnia

chitoh
TELEPIPE

■ There are numerous ways to communicate besides just plugging in text bubbles

■ The controls are surprisingly easy to navigate and nicely user-friendly for newbies

▶ **PLAYSTATION 2**

Phantasy Star Online

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team

Online role-playing arrives with a bang on Dreamcast

Sega's fight for market share in the console arena was a long, arduous one. Despite having one of the strongest software collections in the industry, ranging from the ground-breaking Shenmue to the excellent NFL2K1, there's no denying that Dreamcast never quite got the recognition (or support) it deserved. So when Sega and Sonic Team announced that they would be developing the very first online console RPG, we wondered if this would be the one title to put the system on the map, the reason for console gamers everywhere to join up and battle across the Internet.

And after spending countless hours duking it out online against hordes of alien monsters, while chatting with gamers from every country, we're satisfied that Phantasy Star Online is worth every bit of its hype even if it's not without a few chinks in its role-playing armor. In fact, PSO may at first appear modest to those already steeped in the likes of PC online RPGs such as EverQuest or Ultimo Online.

At the outset, players are treated to the game's underlying premise. As a "hunter" on a massive space colony named Pioneer 2, you're charged with solving the mystery of what happened to the original Pioneer colony sent to inhabit the planet of Ragol. The Pioneer's crew has mysteriously vanished during a large surface explosion as your ship approached the

planet. There's also a more personal story thread that involves a legendary hunter named Red Ring Rico who disappeared along with the Pioneer 1. But all this aside, any storyline within

■ There's a single-player mode, but it's in the online play that PSO excels, doing so with surprising aplomb

PSO has been minimized in order to accommodate the game's larger structures multiplayer online.

Although the de-emphasis of strong story elements in PSO will undoubtedly come as a disappointment to console players, especially those who may be eager for a continuation of the Phantasy Star series, the gameplay more than makes up for it. Players are given a chance to make their way through either a single-player offline mode or the multiplayer online game. Both are identical in terms of how play progresses and their mechanics: You beam down from the main city area and travel through four separate, sprawling dungeons on Ragol's surface, clearing

HP 162 / 162
TP 273 / 523
8
Lv 27 Keiko

Lv 29 ROMI
Lv 48 Serge
Lv 21 DIVINE

Dark Belra
Attribute: Dark

■ There's a lot of graphical flash on display here — you can expect a certain amount of pyrotechnics

rooms full of dangerous creatures and massive bosses.

Both offline and online modes offer three different difficulty levels: Normal, Hard, and Very Hard. The number of experience points, the value of collected items, as well as how tough and how fast each monster is, all change depending on which difficulty you choose. And in order to "complete" PSO, you'll have to build your character up (by traveling with friends online) to a very significant level in order to finish the game, single-player offline, in Very Hard — not an easy feat by any stretch of the imagination.

The gameplay experience smacks of a (richly gorgeous, brilliantly textured) Diablo, with the emphasis on leveling your character up and acquiring that oh-so-rare item. And in practice, it's a formula that is instantly addictive and undeniably solid. With the inclusion of online multiplayer, you can also immerse yourself in the camaraderie of joining up with other live characters, something that previously had only been afforded to PC gamers. Sonic Team has included all sorts of clever communication tools in order to make the process easier, including a large set of preset phrases that can be instantly translated into several different languages. While the translator turns out to be rather clumsy in practice, the other features such as Guild Cards (sort of like electronic business cards) and simple email make finding your friends online or making new acquaintances a snap.

The entire PSO experience, in itself, is unprecedented on a console, and Sonic Team has seen fit to create a painfully beautiful and easy-to-

navigate world filled with surprises, but it is not without its flaws. Because of the online gameplay, it's clearly evident that many things were sacrificed, including a cohesive storyline and complexity in dungeon design, as well as the gameplay itself. There are also some technical issues to tangle with, including lag and the more-than-occasional disconnection.

However, not one of these snags diminishes the genuine appeal and satisfying, addictive gameplay. As a testament to Sega's talented developers and Sonic Team's savvy gaming know-how, PSO is title that shouldn't be ignored.   — Francesco Reyes

HP 162 / 162
TP 273 / 976

■ If this doesn't look like any other RPG you've ever played, don't let that throw you, because you'd miss out on a rare experience

HP 162 / 162
TP 273 / 976

Nice to meet you
> Keiko

■ Talking to other folks from around the world has its own innate appeal, and *Phantasy Star Online* lets you do just that

▶ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Flawed, but absolutely phenomenal — reason enough to mourn the console's passing with an online wake.

■ Many of the boss creatures are as large, detailed, and intimidating as you could possibly ask for — the character graphics are top-notch as well

● Guilty Gear X

▪ **Platform:** Dreamcast ▪ **Publisher:** Sammy ▪ **Developer:** Arc System Works

To the guilty and innocent alike go the beatings. The solid brawler *Guilty Gear X* warmly embraces all the conventions (and clichés) of the 2D fighting genre but redeems itself by not stopping there. Though the jury declares this game guilty of over-reliance on pyrotechnics, parrot-tie-speed lines, dust lockups, explosions, and a lack of analog joystick support, excellent gameplay still assures an Oji-style acquittal.

X features the usual complement of weapon-wielding brutes, freaks, and short-skirted femmes. Its gameplay borrows liberally from both the *Street Fighter* and *Darkstalker* series with its emphasis both on quarter- and half-circle D-pad swipes to create attacks, and on the use of supermoves familiars for some characters — and then it employs a series of special features to leap off into new territory.

A combatant's aggressiveness fuels the game's "Tension Gauge," which enables various offensive and defensive options, and this meter can be disabled during a fight so that a player can attempt a one-hit kill. Additional goodies such as the "Roman Cancel"

▪ **It's pretty and flashy, and it plays beautifully. If you love 2D fighters, this is your game**

system, which enables players to end any move or series of moves at will, and the "Dead-Angle Attack," which affords a grappler the option to counterstrike while blocking, add great weight and depth to the proceedings. Few games manage to capture the delicate interplay of "move" and "countermove" the way this one does.

And the visuals will grab you as well. Made unto the graphical splendor and fine well-animated characters and detailed backgrounds. A fine sense of the comedic, like when the sea-based May hurls dolphins at her foes, serves to keep things light and airy, and a wealth of gameplay modes provides the *coup de grace.* — Greg Orlando

▪ **Next**Gen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: *X* marks the spot for brutality done beautifully.

Kao the Kangaroo

▪ **Platform:** Dreamcast ▪ **Publisher:** Titus ▪ **Developer:** X-Ray/Tate

Keeping firmly in mind Disney's adage that a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, Titus backs up a truckload of white cane goodness for its 3D platformer *Kao the Kangaroo.* Kao is a goofy, gamboling protagonist that must have been created by cuteness experts — even the most blackened soul will find no respite from this marsupial's pint-flip charisma.

Thankfully, the bug-eyed and boxing-glove-wearing Kao is thrust into a brightly colored, gorgeous series of worlds that present endless platform-based challenges. Although the game accomplishes no breakthroughs in the genre, it does avoid a few standard platformer pitfalls by employing a sharp dynamic camera as well as a manual control system. The combination ensures that the hopalong hero will always have a clear path to the next platform and won't be lost amid the eye candy. Tight D-pad and analog stick controls enable conquest of Kao's many jumping puzzles, and a heaven-sent checkpoint system gives you the

▪ **A battling marsupial? Hey, it could happen...**

option to save a game at any point during a level.

Various environments provide the impetus for new challenges. Kao can, for example, glide across ice or swoop over lava in a hang-glider. Oddly designed boss fights (in which dropping an anvil on an enemy's head is less punishing than a quick one-two punch from a diminutive but ever-so-cute kangaroo) detract from play, but only slightly. And if there are one too many chase scenes in which some giant rolling thing presents a crushing threat, well, Titus has enough high-grade sucrose in reserve to ensure smooth hopping. — Greg Orlando

▪ **Next**Gen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: A marsupremier adventure. Pardon the horrible pun — please.

▪ **DREAMCAST**

Evil Dead:
Hail To The King

▪ **Publisher** THQ ▪ **Developer** Heavy Iron Studios

Evil planted, evil grown. Evil has a bitter flavor all its own

▪ **Don't be fooled: The gameplay never gets as good as the graphics**

▶ Something's floating in the D-pad pool, and closer examination reveals it to be THQ's lackluster and horribly flawed 3D adventure, *Evil Dead: Hail to the King.* This bit of sugar-free video malfeasance takes its inspiration, but certainly not its soul, from Sam Raimi's popular *Evil Dead* trilogy, as you control the shell-shocked and not-all-there hero, Ash, in his quest to recover all the pieces of the fabled Necronomicon and find his one true love, Jenny.

At first blush, this seems deliciously appealing. Someone opted for style over substance here, and it shows in every facet of *Hail to the King's* play. However, creepy game environments that actually swallow light and comic quips by actor Bruce Campbell (in the role of Ash) still can't begin to compensate for the mess that's made up of, oh, say, everything that appears after the title screen.

The game relies heavily on its fighting engine, which stinks like a rotted corpse on top of a New Jersey landfill at high noon during a heat wave. Battles are reduced to the worst sort of button-mashing imaginable,

relegating Ash to the role of a chainsaw-wielding thug. Although the game includes "fatality"-style attacks, most fights consist solely of Ash trading blows back and forth with various monstrosities until boredom ensues. Monsters respawn constantly, some in less time than it takes to read this sentence, and often newly hatched enemies appear both in front and

behind our hero, quickly shredding him with little chance to put up any resistance. Ash will often get trapped either by foes or by the confusing terrain that seems to offer working paths branching off the backgrounds where, alas, none actually exist. Lastly, the junky *Resident Evil*-style controls ensure our hero won't be able to run away with ease. — Greg Orlando

▪ **Next**Gen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: With apologies to Carl Sandburg, this game belongs to the Dead, to the Dead and to the Wilderness.

▪ **Not ever a snappy one-liner can save Ash from this mess of a game**

POD Speedzone

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Developer: Ubi Soft

Pod Speedzone is the kind of game that reviewers dread. It's not exactly horrible — it's just boring, which makes the required hours of playtime seem much, much longer.

Pod's biggest problem comes from the fact that it's a futuristic racing game with absolutely no intensity. Sure, your car (or futuristic mutant vehicle thing, as the case may be) may be able to hit speeds of 200 mph, but this only happens on long, empty, boring stretches of track with some of the most unspectacular scenery we've seen in the genre yet. Adding to the tedium is the fact that there aren't enough cars racing against you (only five in total), so most of the race is just spent by yourself, ahead of or behind

▲ **The original Pod wasn't great, but it wasn't bad — sadly, Pod Speedzone is simply bad**

the pads. The lack of any real weapon variety only aggravates the situation because, quite simply, there just isn't much to do. The final nail in the coffin is the actual steering of your vehicle, which, while not necessarily floaty, doesn't make you feel connected to the car or even like you're driving much of anything. Isn't that missing the point?

Sadly, even the SegaNet support can't save this title, since the same problem applies. Only four players can compete on the giant-sized tracks — yawn. Also, it must be noted that, even though the game had been released before this review went to press, there simply weren't very many people online to play against. — Blake Fischer

▲ **This is what passes for visual "splendor" in Speedzone's world**

⮞ **Next**Gen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: As mediocre a racing experience as you can possibly buy.

■ **DREAMCAST**

Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

■ Publisher: Majesco ■ Developer: PipeDream

The thinking man's killing sim

⮞ Let's make this simple: Rogue Spear from Majesco and Pipe Dream Interactive is a top-quality port for Dreamcast. Like its predecessor Rainbow Six, Rogue Spear puts you in control of a band of government operatives who specialize in infiltrating and neutralizing terrorist incidents before they get out of hand.

Despite the obvious first-person perspective and control, the

emphasis here is less on action and more on strategy, meaning that most of your gameplay time is actually spent in the planning stages. Here you choose each soldier who will accompany you and individually arm each operative, and once the team is ready, you can opt either to follow the default plan laid out by the game or create your own. Undoubtedly, the beginning player should stick to the provided plan, but as the missions get more complicated, it becomes necessary to take an increasingly active role in mission planning.

Everything in this game heightens the sense of reality, from the sound effects to the detailed locations. In fact, this is one of those rare titles that feels like more than just a game. The intense pacing, along with

■ **When you consider that one shot can kill you, this gets pretty intense pretty fast**

■ **Hope you've got a thinking cap on under that helmet, because Rogue Spear requires a quick mind as well as a fast draw**

the amount of time spent planning each mission, forces you to become more invested in each individual mission than in your average, more "mindless" shooters. A perfect balance between intellect and adrenaline, Rogue Spear is a near-classic on any system. — Gerard Kenyon

Bottom Line: A title that works on many different levels, Rogue Spear is a must-have for the Dreamcast-owning shooter fan.

Vanishing Point

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Clockwork Games

A smart and savvy racing game, Vanishing Point embraces a strange sort of philosophy (at least among most of the games we've seen lately). It basks its flash and spectacle on top of a solid and competent gameplay engine instead of using the flash as its raison d'etre. This philosophy has propelled the developers to create a game as solid to look at as to play, and as deep as it is fun.

VP offers many challenges. You can opt to plow through a series of races against a time clock on roadways inhabited by cream drivers (which are purely obstacles, not competition) — it's an exercise in skill and, occasionally, frustration. An excellent Stunt mode enables would-be Dukes of Hazzard to perform mad jumps, make screeching turns, crush balloons, weave madly through obstacles, and so on. In a breathless series of competitions. Two players can amuse themselves with VP's splendid head-to-head modes, which spotlight a race wherein rivals compete on the same track but travel in
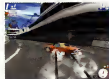
■ **Although you're mostly racing alone, Vanishing Point is still a pretty fine racer**

opposite directions. A limited set of Internet options also enables you to post your high scores online.

A solid 60fps framerate anchors Point's play, and the game holds a nice lineup of popular cars. Although the handling on some of the game's initial vehicles can only be considered crusty, most of the later, unlockable ones are easily tamed, and all cars can be tampered with to suit a player's needs As for the rest of the package, well, it's pretty and it purrs like a Porsche, which is great news for all — Greg Orlando

⮞ **Next**Gen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: We can safely point to this as an example of fine craftsmanship.

007 Racing

■ Publisher: EA Games **■ Developer:** Eutechnyx

"No Mr. Bond, I expect you to *die...*"

SCORE 002600

■ If you ever dreamed of being James Bond, keep dreaming — 007 Racing won't get you any closer

➔ With 16 gigs of gadgets, wide European style, and dream cars decked out with weapons aplenty, James Bond offers a ton of fodder for videogames. With 007 Racing you're given the opportunity to at least take those legendary vehicles for a spin, but the game gets off to an unstable start and doesn't get much better at any point after that.

The story contains the ubiquitous trappings of any good Bond adventure: a plot to enslave the world, locations that span the globe, explosive thrills, and dubiously humorous sexual innuendo. Each mission features a classic 007 car, including the silvery Aston Martin, the Lotus Esprit, and the pair of

BMWs that helped make the last couple of films memorable. Each one, however, is mostly equipped with the same weaponry, including missiles, oil slicks, and shields, making them almost functionally identical. The graphics are strictly middle-of-the-road, with bland textures and competent if unexciting models. Control is well suited to auto-based action, and the cars turn quickly enough, although they're a tad twitchy.

Unfortunately, the car-based combat — the heart of the game — is all over the map and the reprehensible addition of an auto-switch targeting feature make things particularly frustrating, especially while you're being besieged from all sides. The missions are poorly balanced, and there's little incentive to play through any of them twice, while the Versus mode is equally forgettable. Sexual-rota movies and menus make for a lackluster finish — you're better off picking up a cheap copy of the two-year-old *Vigilante 8*. — *David Chen*

■ It's not just that the gameplay is dull, but the graphics are strictly uninspired too

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Disney's The Emperor's New Groove

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Sony ■ Developer: Argonaut Games

It's rare to find a kids game that's well crafted, and even more so when that game is based on the scene of the hour. Yet Disney's The Emperor's New Groove overcomes the odds, offering a slick, simple platformer that's quite a charmer. A fun and jumper in the vein of Spyro and Crash, Groove is neither original nor fresh, but it manages to do all the right things.

Controls are smooth and make good use of the analog stick. Kuzco (the sardonic llama-come-sleep) can sprint, jump, spit grape seeds, and even punch with his front hooves, as llamas are wont to do. True to the genre, this features gratuitous coin collecting, plenty of secrets, and a

nice mixture of gameplay styles.

The visuals are simple yet true to their source and don't have the rushed feel we've come to expect from tie-in titles. In addition to the standard, straight-from-the-movie inserts, the game features cut scenes and voiceovers of better-than-passing quality plus a clever tutorial.

Like most contemporary animated films (and their games), Groove features a dose of watered-down, wry humor, proving it's never too early to

start nurturing cynicism. Obviously it's tailored to the younger set, but you could do far worse. — *David Chen*

■ Emperor's New Groove boasts surprisingly slick graphics and gameplay for a licensed title

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Razor Freestyle Scooter

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Crave ■ Developer: Shaba Games

Starring a slew of wholesome, push-barely-teenage street punks straight from the Burger King gang, Crave's Razor is one of the more quickly banged-out examples of cross marketing we've ever seen. It's another trick-based, "extreme" title (here's a storyline involving some nonsense about a mad robot, but otherwise it's just a straight-up stunt game) that's light on just about everything, featuring solid, elementary gameplay obviously in deference to its target audience.

The trio of levels found here is handy enough, but there are additional Challenge rounds on six sky-castle levels, features a sky-high competition in an airborne skate park that'll keep your interest up. A short time limit and hiding ties add an interesting twist and actually make this a bit of a challenge.

However, there's little to differenti-

ate this from dozens of other similar stunt games out there. That isn't a bad thing, exactly — you'd be surprised at how pulling off a particularly nimble series of tricks evokes that familiar visceral thrill — but it's a bit pint-sized in this case. There is a barely implemented time extender we've never seen before. Pull off a particularly intricate combo and another ten seconds is yours. It's a great idea, but it's brought down slightly by the training wheel-esque, underage trappings.

Visually this is on par with most of the more mature stunt games, and the urban-industrial look of the kiddies is kind of cool, especially when they wipe out.

Supercross 2001

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Sports

Naming the Supercross 2001 doesn't exactly help in putting last year's dreadful Supercross 2000 out of our minds. Thankfully, however, this time around the game is a much more playable, less of a hardcore simulation, and more on par with the intense action of the successful Excitebike 64.

The down side to this is that the real-world physics and other elements of realism have been mostly taken out, leaving the whole endeavor feeling much like an arcade game. Anyone looking for a realistic depiction of this style of racing will be out of luck. The up side is that the controls are much more consistent than in Supercross 2000, or even Moto Racer World Tour.

Supercross 2001 also delivers an excellent selection of gameplay modes including single race, time trial, freestyle practice, competition, and even a series in which you must compete in supercross, motocross, and freestyle events. You can also expect the usual assortment of real-world racers and a variety of truly remarkable courses, along with some rather impressive graphics that more than make up for the game's lack of

realism. In the end it feels like a fair tradeoff, resulting in some addictive racing action. — *Peter Suciu*

■ It's not up to Ricky Carmichael standards, but then, what is? Supercross 2001 is much improved

■ Once Kabuto has reached his full height, he can actually impale opponents on his horns to eat later

■ This game takes massive power to run — notice the frame counter

Giants: Citizen Kabuto

Publisher: Interplay / Developer: Planet Moon

You'd better have the right stuff if you want to take on this giant

■ Landscapes are vaguely alien and incredibly detailed. Sometimes you just have to stop and enjoy a sunset

Breaking all genre boundaries, Planet Moon has created the single most ambitious title to hit the PC since Deus Ex. When the credits roll and the epic is done, those who are lucky enough to have embarked on the strange, quirky journey that is Giants: Citizen Kabuto will have played an RTS, an action adventure, an FPS-style capture the flag, a fighting game with 60-foot monsters, and even a kart racer. Giants evolves as it progresses, introducing new elements and ideas, until at the end you're left with a game that, by virtue of combining so many different traditional genres, becomes something entirely new.

The setting for Giants is a vast island where three groups battle for supremacy. The first, the Meccs, are standard space marines complete with a lust for life, lager, and ladies. Meccs focus on big guns and mechanical defenses. The Sea Reapers are the second group, an aquatic race that values magic over technology. The six-story, King Kong-esque monstrosity named Kabuto completes the trio.

There is only one limited resource on the island, and it's constantly fought over by all three factions. Called Smarties, these are little guys with big brains and loud mouths used by the Meccs to develop new weaponry and the Reapers to do spell research. Kabuto just eats them and gets even bigger, eventually producing offspring.

While gameplay in Giants is fun and diverse, the graphics can only be described as spectacular. Huge, rolling vistas are spread out under amazing sunsets with lush vegetation and interesting rock formations scattered around the landscape.

There are some problems with this hodgepodge of gorgeous visuals and unique gameplay, though. The multiplayer is extremely unstable even over a LAN, and the three factions aren't as balanced as we'd like. Neither of these problems, however, put much of a dent in the overwhelming success of this great game. — Daniel Erickson

POWER LEADS TO HAPPINESS

One thing that must be mentioned when talking about Giants is the absolutely ridiculous amount of hardware power required to run the game. While the box lists a 350MHz Pentium II as the minimum required, we found the game absolutely unplayable on anything less than a 500MHz PIII. During the last jet ski race we were using that exact machine with a shiny new Nvidia GeForce2 and 256MB RAM. By setting every single graphics option to its absolute lowest setting, we were able to get the game to run at about 12 frames per second. However, despite such unstable framerates, the game itself was still a blast.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A brilliantly conceived, beautiful epic of giant proportions.

GAMES

GIRLS

GEAR

Konoko from Oni
by Bungie

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Blair Witch 3:
The Elly Kedward Tale

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Gathering of Developers** ■ Developer: **Ritual**

Of the three Blair Witch games released in the last few months, this is arguably the best. Of course, that still isn't saying much. In a nutshell, you take the role of 17th-century pastor Jonathan Prye on a mission to rid Blair Township of the witches plaguing the community. The ultimate goal is, ostensibly, to face Hecatomix and fight a few other bosses along the way. Once again this uses the Nocturne engine, and it all looks decent, with nice details and effects.

The game, however, is so buggy that the experience is more akin to beta testing than playing. The (non-adjustable) camera views sometimes stick your character offscreen. The AI is questionable at best — getting behind some boss enemies causes them to stand still. Load times, though short, are far too frequent, and the load screens subject your monitor to a disturbing cycle of seemingly random resolution/refresh rates. Ambient sound effects take precedence in the CPU over key presses.

We could go on, but the point is

■ The Elly Kedward Tale is a good argument for putting the whole Blair Witch thing permanently to rest

made. This plays like a poor man's Resident Evil, minus the atmosphere and any actual scares. The interactivity is kept to a minimum, with prescripted events dictating the "action." The control is a bit unresponsive, and the story is riddled with inconsistencies; for example, a priest who supposedly doesn't believe in spiritual powers still gives you a magical Bible later in the game. On top of all this mediocrity we installed this game at 11:46 a.m. and uninstalled it at 6:12 p.m. on the same day, having beaten it in between. Even at $20, that isn't worth it.

— Kevin Rice

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It's never scary, it's not challenging, and it's just mildly entertaining. Only the most diehard Blair Witch fan would care at this point.

1nsane

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Codemasters** ■ Developer: **Invictus**

Microsoft's superlative Motocross Madness excluded, few titles have managed to successfully capture the visceral thrill of off-road racing. From the flawed 4X4 Evolution to the just plain terrible Test Drive: Off Road, the dirt track to gaming nirvana is littered with mud-splattered corpses

1nsane is Codemasters' attempt, an ambitious, free roaming companion piece to their excellent Colin McRae series. Unfortunately, despite some interesting features and a breathtaking sense of speed, 1nsane doesn't quite measure up.

Everything is customizable, from shocks and handling all the way up to the racetracks themselves. Yet despite this wealth of options, when you finally hit the racetrack it's hard not to feel underwhelmed. Simply put, 1nsane's various vehicles are all too floaty for their own good, flipping and rolling seemingly without warning. Consequently all but the easiest races quickly transform into nail-biting

■ 1nsane might have benefited from being a bit more intense — or then again, maybe not

exercises in frustration. Likewise, the visuals are clean and competent, with detailed car models and a decent variety of gritty landscapes, but they're far from spectacular.

While these flaws aren't fatal, they do undermine what is otherwise an enjoyable racer, especially when playing one of the frenzied multiplayer modes. As such, 1nsane remains a decent game, but not the great one it could so easily have been.
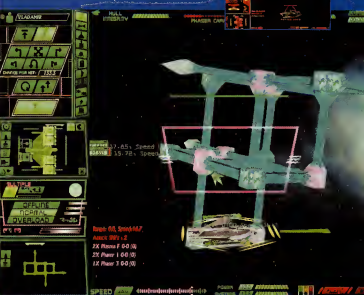
— Samuel Bass

■ **NextGen** ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: A fun, flawed game, 1nsane doesn't quite live up to the expectations raised by its ambitious design.

■ PC
Starfleet Command:
Empires at War

■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **Taldren**

Make it so

■ Starfleet battles have a tendency to get up close and personal

■ The original Starfleet Command hit the shelves in 1999 and surprised a lot of people. For one thing, it was beautiful. For another, it didn't stink, as have so many Star Trek-based games before it. It sold more than 400,000 copies and was hailed as one of the best strategy games of the year. So it shouldn't come as a shock to see Interplay come back with a sequel.

Starfleet Command: Empires at War unfolds very much like the previous game, with gorgeous graphics and a similar gameplay style. You control a starship belonging to one of eight stellar races and are ordered to battle competing life forms. In fact, very little has changed.

There are a few new kinks. Two new races, the Interstellar Concordium and the Mirak Star League, have joined the Klingons, Romulans, and other Federation enemies. There are also close to 600 hundred new

■ There are more than 600 ships available

ships crowding the galaxies. And George Takei (Sulu) does voiceovers for the intro movie and tutorials.

Otherwise, there's not much that's different, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. The Star Trek universe is unchanged, and gameplay is still deep, balanced, and complex. As captain, you have only so much energy to allocate among weapons, sensors, transporters, shields, and tractor beams. So you plow into battle

with a jillion complicated buttons to push, though hotkeys do offer a few shortcuts. Hesitate, and you're toast.

It's a dandy space game, intense and challenging — but it's not for everyone. Whether you're a hardcore strategy addict with quick keyboard fingers or just a Star Trek wonk, you'll love it. If you dread overloaded control panels and the beefy manuals required to explain them, perhaps you should skip this flight.

— John Lee

■ **NextGen** ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Starship mission: to boldly go where Starfleet Command has gone before.

■ PC

Cossacks: European Wars

Or, Age of Cossacks

■ Publisher: **Strategy First**   ■ Developer: **CDV Software**

■ Cossacks offers wargaming of a slightly different stripe and does it remarkably well

Get ready for another invasion from overseas. Fresh on the heels of the European hit Sudden Strike, German-based publisher CDV is shipping a huge new battle sim to our shores, this one designed in Russia.

Don't expect tanks or bombers this time. Cossacks takes us farther back in history for widescreen battles with hundreds, even thousands, of archers, pikemen, grenadiers, cavalry, and cannoneers. You pick one of 16 countries and march into authentic 16th- to 18th-century battles such as the Thirty Years War, War for Spanish Succession, Ukrainian Independence, Northern wars, and even sea battles.

The battles are huge and mesmerizing to watch, with massive land formations of up to 8,000 individual troops at a time. With so many figures running around, you'll want to organize cohesive groups, each with an officer at its head, and use marching columns, battle lines,

and the famous British square to tailor your fighting strategies.

It may take time to start the big battles, due to nagging micro-management chores, but once you pet them, you're in for a treat. You can choose from four extended campaigns of 10 battles each or opt for individual fights. In all, you'll find more than 85 large and small wars represented.

Obviously the game looks and plays remarkably like Age of Empires, including construction, growing food, and mining minerals — and there's a reason for this. The Russian programmers were so enamored of AoE that they played it for a full year, just to see what made it tick. It was time well spent. The graphics are gorgeous — cannonballs and gunshot sweep through clashing troops, while buildings burn and explode. Even the water shimmers and splashes, and the gameplay easily lives up to the graphics. — John Lee

■ Next**Gen** ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Like an old movie poster, this carnival of carnage can claim "a cast of thousands" — as well as adjectives like "thrilling," "sweeping," and, occasionally, "glorious."

Europa Universalis

■ Platform: **PC**   ■ Publisher: **Strategy First**   ■ Developer: **Paradox Entertainment**

At first blush, the new Swedish import Europa Universalis seems like little more than another Impression clone. And yes, the games are similar — micromanagement, troop recruitment, diplomacy, exploration, colonization, big maps with minimal animation. Even the tutorials seem five twins.

But you won't spend your time building roads and planting crops in Europa Universalis. Based on the complex French board game, it deals with 300 years of political history from the discovery of the New World in 1492 to the first chop of the French guillotine in 1792, and the scope is huge, involving 75 world governments.

Gameplay, however, is realtime, which makes it difficult to survive and prosper. You must control your corner of the world, build armies, negotiate

treaties, explore virgin lands, colonize, and manage your economy. And you'd better do it quickly, because computer-controlled nations are evolving while you dither.

For single-play relief, you can set the clock as fast as a year per minute during slow periods, or stretch it to a month per minute when you need extra time. On the other hand, realtime is a boon for the multiplayer mode — working simultaneously often forces slowpoke competitors to hustle, rather than taking forever

■ The graphics may not make it seem that exciting, but Europa Universalis still ain't all bad

between turns and driving other players to distraction — John Lee

■ Next**Gen** ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A full-bodied simulation of European turmoil and global expansion between the 15th and 18th centuries, Europa Universalis isn't all that original, but if historical realism is your passion, you'll like what you see.

Freedom: First Resistance

■ Platform: **PC**   ■ Publisher: **Red Storm**   ■ Developer: **Red Storm**

Based on the works of Anne McCaffrey, Freedom manages to take a passable concept and turn it into a barely competent mishmash of design concepts so half-baked they collapse. The game drags you into the admittedly unique combat boosts of Angel Sanchez, a young Hispanic woman confined to a refugee camp after an alien invasion, and it isn't long before she joins the resistance against those dastardly Catteni.

The game is an odd hybrid, combining basic third-person exploration, inane dialogue trees, clunky combat, and some of the worst AI this side of Daikatana. Follow Angel as she meanders from one simplistic environment to another, solving dumb

puzzles and engaging in the odd bout of alien blasting so imprecise that it's practically the definition of frustrating.

While this cutrate Deus Ex could have been harmless, things are further soured when you're saddled with a variety of painfully moronic sidekicks. Far too much time is spent backtracking through the dull levels, searching for a companion who — guess what? — managed to get lodged into a wall mere feet from the starting point.

Dull, flawed, and lacking in almost every area, Freedom: First Resistance

■ Make no mistake, this is one of the worst PC action strategy games in quite a while

is as painful and inept a game as you're likely to find — Samuel Boss

■ Next**Gen** ☆☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: With games like these, Earth deserves to be wiped out by aliens.

Project IGI: I'm Going In

■ Platform: **PC**   ■ Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**   ■ Developer: **Innerloop**

If games were judged by the quality of their visuals alone, Project IGI would stand head and shoulders above its competition. From the awe-inspiring grandeur of its massive outdoor environments to the starkly detailed interiors, there is a sense of scale here unmatched in the action gaming arena. The easy game world seems, literally, to stretch on as far as the eye can see, adding an incredible sense of isolation to the otherwise generic covert operations tale.

Gameplay starts out equally strong, as you're charged with sneaking into a variety of top-secret military installations, knocking off enemies and disabling security cameras in traditional sneak-'em-up style. Unfortunately a variety of crippling design flaws manages to quickly undercut the

excitement, rendering what could have been an engrossing military experience thoroughly mediocre.

The worst offenders are IGI's braindead array of terrorists and militia types, blessed with artificial intelligence so lacking that it makes Nowalogic's Delta Force goons look passively brilliant. Patrolling guards tend to keep walking, oblivious as their buddies are gunned down around them, shrugging off the hail of bullets as little more than a change in the weather.

Given that the game offers neither a multiplayer mode nor a level editor,

■ It may look terrific, but Project IGI has almost nothing else to recommend it

such flawed design is pretty much unforgivable. Compounding this is the lack of an in-game save, which renders many of the later, trickier levels frustratingly repetitive. And so, once again, a glittering exterior comes wrapped around a mediocre title, one riddled with fatal flaws. — Samuel Boss

■ Next**Gen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: After a promising start, I'm Going In quickly transforms itself into a frustratingly mediocre experience.

ON BEING MATURE

Congratulations on a well-written and ambitious piece. While the image of a topless Lara Croft being covered by the hands of Duke Nukem will probably bring you guys a ton of hate mail, I think it was appropriate. If anyone is offended, I have one thing to say: Grow up. But I really want to compliment you on the article itself. The insights of Dr. Henry Jenkins, as well as

Rockstar President Sam Houser, lent a nice sense of credibility to the feature, and I think the article echoes the sentiments of many gamers.

Jeff Cunningham
Via email

Alas, there were different opinions:

Let me see if I understand this: Tom Russo, Editor-in-Chief of **Next Gen**,

bemoans the lack of maturity in gaming (with which I wholeheartedly agree) and devotes an entire article and editorial to the subject. But according to his editorial his biggest beef is that he can't show Lara Croft's breasts on the cover of **Next Gen**? Hmmm, I wonder why the media still has the perception that gamers are immature?

Randy Sluganski
Via email

I have received your magazine for a number of years now, and I feel that your article about the sex and violence in videogames was right-on. The problem is not in videogames, movies, music, or any other form of entertainment. The problem is in the personal moral failings of people, and the wrong opinions of those who believe that videogames, movies, and music cause tragedies like Columbine. Unfortunately, I feel that the problem between the U.S. Senate and the game industry will not be resolved until my generation, which understands technology and what videogames are all about (having fun), is finally in Congress.

Jeff Lloyd
Via email

And by the time our generation is in Congress, there will doubtless be some even newer technology that kids are into and can't be trusted. Funny how that always seems to happen from one generation to the next...

Your article, which by its title was to deal with the maturation of the gaming industry, concentrated exclusively on the issues of sex and violence. Now I don't blame **Next Gen** for this — the article itself made many good points on those subjects — but the fact that the western world has rendered the terms "adult" and "mature" synonymous with sex and violence is, I think, extremely telling.

Are our games more "mature," in the true sense of the word, when they feature big tits and hi-res disemboweling? Is that an end worth fighting for, philosophically? I would not stand in the way of sex

and violence. It is inevitable, unstoppable, and it does serve a practical purpose. But this is not a mature medium yet. It is still an adolescent one, given to rashness and self-indulgence. As long as excessive sex and violence sell games (and, ahem, magazines), we are going to see the dimmer bulbs out there use this to compensate for their lack of content. Let's not dwell on the facile and the superficial. Games with bad taste will be made, yes, but that's a symptom of any given medium, and they should be recognized as trash. I would hope that **Next Gen** and others in the vanguard with the power to influence others will keep the spotlight focused on some of the true signs of maturity: responsibility, creativity, and emotional depth.

Bill Jamison
Via email

We'll do our best to keep the spotlight on quality, Bill. But remember games are no different from any other growing and rapidly changing entertainment medium. For example, the breakup of the Hayes film censorship code back in the 1960s did eventually enable such serious meditations on the nature of violence as Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* or Coppola's *Godfather* films, but first came the gore films of Herschel Gordon Lewis (*Blood Feast, Two Thousand Maniacs*, et al). Yet without the gleefully immature pushing of the envelope, there's no space to grow. The sad fact is that you can't squash one without squashing the other.

REVEALED! METAL GEAR SOLID 2 IN ACTION

Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #2 02/01

Next Generation Magazine

→NextGen

SEX & VIOLENCE
You've grown up. When will your games? Page 54

THE GAMER'S GUIDE RETURNS!
777 Games Rated

EXPOSED!
SUPERCAR STREET CHALLENGE
FLOIGAN BROTHERS
BLOODY ROAR 3
KESSEN II
THE FINAL FANTASY MOVIE

imagine

HANDS-ON REVIEWS:
Tomb Raider Chronicles
Banjo-Tooie
Grandia II
MechWarrior 4: Vengeance
Skies of Arcadia

Dreamcast ■ Nintendo 64 ■ PlayStation 2 ■ PC ■ Xbox ■ Gamecube

● Our February cover would have been even more controversial if it had looked like we'd originally wanted it to

Matt Casamassina's article on GameCube and PS2 (NG 12/00) was just too much. Mr. Casamassina supports his whole argument that GameCube is practically as powerful as PS2 on the basis of polygon count. He states that Sony admits that the PS2 polygonal limit is 20 million polys per second, which is completely inaccurate; Sony, either on or off the record, would never admit such a thing. I haven't ever gotten a definite number when talking to Sony execs or PS2 developers, and I sure haven't read anything anywhere indicating PS2's "maxed-out" poly count. I don't believe there's anyone who can reliably assess that number right now. In any case, this was nothing compared to inaccurate reporting I can only suspect was intentional. Casamassina asserts that PS2 can generate only 20 million polys, and when he applies all the usual 3D effects to that number, it goes below 12 million. What Matt forgets to mention is that those 20 to 25 million polys have all the 3D effects already applied, having dropped from more than 70 million unshaded triangles per second.

This is clearly a misleading statement, giving the wrong impressions about two competing systems, one of which isn't even out yet. I strongly believe journalists shouldn't take sides at all, especially at transitional periods like this and so openly. Give Mr. Casamassina the editor's seat at your GameCube mag when it comes out (sometime in 2003, as it seems), and let him rave all that he wants about the greatness of Nintendo. If this means that he has to claim that GameCube is 156 times more powerful than Xbox, at least he will be preaching to the converted and everybody will be happy.

Kostas Farkon
Via email

As a columnist, Matt Casamassina's opinions are his own — as are, we should probably make clear, those of Xbox's X-philes columnist, and the PS2 columnist before (and News Bytes, for that matter). It's not uncommon, in fact, for competing columns to contradict one another and, in fact, we're quite pleased when they do — enabling two (or more) system evangelists to scream at each other vaguely mirrors what happens in the gaming audience at large.

Please, feel free (as you have done) to call him on anything you think is bogus.

Being the "Dreamcast pundit" that I am, here's my argument for an extra half, or even whole, star for Sega's first-party rating in the January issue ("Got Talent?" NG 01/01). As you said, Nintendo "very, very, very rarely ships a bad game." In comparison to Sega, they also very, very, very rarely ship any games. Going by your feature article's lists, if we only count Sega's internal development teams and Visual Concepts, and Nintendo's internal development teams and Rare, Sega has a stunning 26 titles for the Dreamcast's first two years as opposed to Nintendo's 14 titles for the entirety of the N64's existence. That's almost twice as many games in half the time. Not to mention the fact that it's absurd to rank Sega after Nintendo just because of one bad sports game (WSB2K1). One could say the presence of a baseball game at all is better than none, and when was the last time Nintendo put out a baseball, basketball, hockey, or even football title?

Walter Kim
Via email

Nintendo certainly wouldn't win any quantity awards. We agree with you there, and we believe Sega's first-party has done a wonderful job keeping Dreamcast stocked with great games. But Sega still rushes the occasional title out the door, where Nintendo takes the extra time to tune its titles. According to sources inside Sega, WSB2K1 was rushed out the door two months earlier than it was originally scheduled. The gameplay, expectations of consumers, and a spotless franchise record were destroyed simply to please some executives within the company. Nintendo's last baseball game, Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest, was released in the summer of '99 and received a four-star review from this magazine.

Next Gen, I've had it! Sega is doing an amazing job and is having the best years in sales in its life! But recent news says that they're pulling the Dreamcast hardware and sticking to software. This has got to be wrong because their sales in America were neck-and-neck with PS2. This has got to make up for the bad Japanese sales. I don't want to have to buy a PS2 eventually to play Sega games in 2002 and beyond.

Iceman
Marlboro, NJ

Sega's announcement is hitting everyone differently, and we understand the general disappointment of Sega fans. Sega's main problem wasn't so much one of raw sales; though the relative lack of Dreamcast sales in Japan certainly didn't help, believe it or not, Dreamcast was the fastest-selling console ever in the U.S. Instead, Sega's problem was more one of overcoming the debt it's accrued over the years, and of the need to simply start making money faster than they're required to spend it by banking a hardware company.

It's interesting, actually, because just prior to Sega's official announcement, we got a large number of letters and emails that said, roughly, the following:

I've been reading online that Sega is planning on developing for rival game consoles. As a fan I'd like to give my opinion. I think Sega should develop for rival consoles and become a third-party company. Each quarter Sega loses money, and I fear that unless they do something, they won't survive. They should stop Dreamcast production in March. Then they should license the Dreamcast technology to other companies to be integrated into PCs and other electronic devices. After that they should concentrate on developing for PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, and Dreamcast, which would be in other devices. This plan is most likely the only way Sega will make a profit and get to their goal of 25% software marketshare.

C. N.
Via email

Sega's impending entry into the market as an instantaneously massive third-party publisher has landed like a bomb in some segments of the industry. We'll point one more time to EA President John Riccitiello's "Chrysler making BMWs" comment in News Bytes (see page 8) as an example of the kind of surreal nonsense that was almost the rule, and not the exception in the days following Sega's announcement.

And things will likely get even stranger long before they settle down.

The Wall Street Journal today reported that Imagine Media had suspended coverage of Nintendo products in all of its publications. I had assumed that Next Gen, a publication for the "mature gamer," would stay above the fray. I've read Next Gen since its inception. I'm a finance professional, 30-something who spends thousands of hours (and dollars) a year playing videogames — in short the type of reader I had assumed Next Gen was launched to serve. It's your job to report the news and products of the entire gaming industry. Regardless of Imagine's reasons, it appears petty, immature, and unprofessional. To quote your February issue "Next Gen was launched to meet the sophisticated needs of hardcore gamers." I ask you only to live up to your own words.

Forrest Skriletz
Via email

And then there were these:

I don't really give a damn who sues whom, but if I don't get the information I want and pay for then I'm not gonna pay for it. And I want to be updated on news about Nintendo. So I'm taking my subscription and flushing it. Get your act together and I'll consider resubscribing.

Kip Kirwan
Via email

Relax. According to the suits upstairs, the ban on Nintendo coverage has been lifted. We regret and apologize for the lack of information on Nintendo last issue. While Imagine Media still has every intention of fighting the lawsuit Nintendo has brought upon it, our legal team has conceded to let us return to covering Nintendo in our usual fashion. Still, there isn't all that much to cover; Nintendo has been very quiet as it winds down on N64 and ramps up for GameCube. For the latest on- and off-the-record info on Nintendo's new machine, check out GameCube Watch on page 10.

April 1960
Before the revolution...

→ Bowling machines and shuffle alleys dominated the arcades of 1960, but hardcore gamers were still playing pinball. At least, when it wasn't illegal. Early machines lacked flippers,

▪ Arcades looked very different back in 1960

and the playfield was littered with holes into which the player had to sink the balls, Tic-Tac-Toe-style. The winners often received cash payouts, causing the machines to be outlawed as illegal gambling devices. The introduction of flippers and pop bumpers in the late 1940s helped shape pinball into the skill-based amusement machine it is today, but the bingo-esque nature of gameplay continued to get the games kicked out of arcades. In 1960, Gottlieb introduced Flipper, a landmark machine that enabled players to win extra balls (instead of cash or extra games that could be exchanged for cash). This seemingly subtle adjustment enabled pinball to return to

many arcades where it had been banned since the '30s.

This was also the year in which the seeds of modern gaming were sown. AT&T introduced the Dataphone, the first commercially available modem, while MIT's John McCarthy created LISP, the first computer language designed for writing artificial intelligence routines. Most importantly, DEC announced its PDP-1 computer, the machine on which proto-hackers at MIT would create *SpaceWar!*, which is widely regarded as the very first modern videogame.

What we were playing
Joystick? What's a joystick?

■ TEN STRIKE	■ PLAYLAND	■ NAGS	■ SKY RAIDER	■ LIGHTNING BALL
▪ Genre: Mannequin bowler ▪ Publisher: Williams	▪ Genre: Shooting gallery ▪ Publisher: Chicago Coin	▪ Genre: Pinball ▪ Publisher: Williams	▪ Genre: Shooting gallery ▪ Publisher: United	▪ Genre: Pinball ▪ Publisher: D. Gottlieb & Co.

1960
The jukebox

Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini	Bryan Hyland
The Twist	Chubby Checker
Teen Angel	Mark Dining
Stay	Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs
Alley Oop	Hollywood Argyles
Georgia on My Mind	Ray Charles
Mack the Knife	Ella Fitzgerald
Are You Lonesome Tonight?	Elvis Presley

...and in the real world

■ The Flintstones, from Bill Hanna & Joe Barbera's animation studio, debuts. In many ways a shameless reworking of The Honeymooners, it is the first made-for-primetime-television cartoon ever. In other notable firsts, the first working Laser (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) is constructed by T. H. Maiman. The first weather and communications satellites are launched, named Tiros I and Echo I respectively. The first Teflon cookware goes on sale at Macy's in New York. The first televised presidential debates take place, between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy.

■ The Cold War rages on. A U-2 spy plane, piloted by American Francis Gary Powers, is shot down over the U.S.S.R. Powers survives and must be returned to the U.S. two years later in exchange for a captured Soviet spy. In the meantime, Polaris missiles are successfully test-fired from U.S. submarines, enabling the military to relocate much of its nuclear arsenal underwater, safe from a Soviet first strike.

■ In sports news, the Pittsburgh Pirates defeat the New York Yankees in the World Series, 4 games to 3; a young unknown named Cassius Clay wins the Olympic Gold Medal in light heavyweight boxing; and a group of businessmen launch the eight-team American Football League to compete with the NFL. It prompts the 1967 debut of the Super Bowl and merges with the NFL in 1970, becoming the AFC conference.

■ Parents took their children to see Disney's Pollyanna, then sneaked back out to see Anthony Perkins in Psycho.

■ Born in 1960:

Jennifer Grey	Neil Gaiman
Bono	Paul Azal
David Duchovny	Nana
Chuck D.	Kyle Petty
Jean Claude Van Damme	Valerie Bertinelli

BackwardsCompatible

"It's Spaghetti Western meets Star Wars. Even our hero's outfit is very Clint Eastwood." Wanna know more? Page 51. No wonder this guy is disposable — he's clearly the son of Godzilla and King Kong, and that just can't have been a happy household to grow up in. Page 86. **What is it with all the good Star Trek games coming out?** Is this a sign of the Apocalypse? Should we be hoarding canned goods? Page 89. How Diablo's influence has made it a very, very good time to own a Dreamcast. Page 80. **Resident Evil: The Early Years. Page 72.** Cel-shaded hangs, running from the cops, and a character who looks incredibly like Wendy O. Williams during her Plasmatics days. We love this game already. Page 34. **This month's philosophical question: Is it still a Speedzone if nobody actually speeds through it?** Page 34. Okay, so you've fallen into a lake, and you need help. Do you call to your friend the Gabbit, wave to the Vykker on the shore, or scream bloody murder and hope there's a Mudokon nearby? Page 40. **The first real, in-depth look at the Indroma. Awesome, open-source game console of the future, or just a really cool TiVo/DVD combo machine? Page 62.** This game features Eric's ideal racing vehicle — a pickup truck with cartoon hillbilly pigs painted onto it. Be afraid. Be very afraid. Page 31. **Actually, the king is probably ruling over in his grave right about now. Too bad. If he'd have actually risen from it, he could have been in the game. Page 83.** A LucasArts game so good, we're getting really close to forgiving them for Episode One. Page 70. **An Xbox game from the designers of Jedi Knight? Oh, we are so there. Page 54.** They were going to go with an English name on this one, but "Water Wizard" just didn't have enough pizzazz. Page 77. **So you're into online gaming, and you think you're pretty hot stuff, eh? Prove it. Page 43.** Don't get too excited people. Despite what this may look like, she's really about to snap his neck. Page 74. We can honestly say that this fellow is one of the most visionary designers in gaming today. He's got great hair, too. Page 56. Great news for anyone who's wishing for more games with firey-headed undead pirates and paper-thin cartoon dogs wearing stocking caps. Page 11.

NextMonth **Ozzy's Black Skies**

■ Can an Ozzy Osbourne-themed game make gamers kick ass or merely nod?

NextGen **05/01** on sale April 17, 2001
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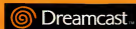# HEAD BLOW'D OFF REPAIR KIT

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UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Unreal™ Tournament's fast and furious, online multiplayer experience comes to life on Sega Dreamcast.™ Lead your team of virtual teammates against the deadliest gladiators in the galaxy. Mind-blowing realistic 3D graphics. High-octane gameplay. Totally Unreal combat action. Just be sure not to lose your head.

NextGen

The First Xbox Games ● Sega Goes Multi-Platform ● The Indrema Console Exposed